SOCIAL MEDIA "TALK" & GENDER VIOLENCE: DISCOURSES OF GENDER VIOLENCE ON FACEBOOK BY AUDIENCES OF E-TV'S *SCANDAL*

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Thesis submitted to the Department of Communication Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (DLitt et Phil) in Communication Studies.

January 2019

Dedication

To God be the glory

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my supervisor, Professor Nyasha Mboti, for your patience and guidance, without which this thesis would not have been a reality. To my girls: Kundai Michelle; Tinotenda; Nkensane; Mandidaishe Olyn; I am grateful for your understanding and patience when I could not be with you while I wrote the thesis. You are all my source of inspiration and this thesis is to give you hope that all things are possible with God. I pray this thesis motivates you to unleash your full potentials in life. To the UJ School of Communication, thank you for all the learning resources which contributed to the success of this thesis.

Declaration

I, Millie Phiri (Student Number: 216049940), declare that this thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (Communication Studies) at the University of the Johannesburg, is my own original, unaided work. Where other people's work has been used, I have cited it appropriately. The study has not been previously submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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Millie Mayiziveyi Phiri

31 January 2019

Abstract

Violence against women is common, serious, and takes many forms. These forms include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. These forms also have profound implications for every aspect of women's lives. This study is about what we can learn from studying how society *talks*, on social media, about battered women. This phenomenon is described as "social media talk". The study sought to establish the evolution of social discourse in the age of digital networks by examining the phenomenon of social media talk in relation to regimes of representation of gender violence. Data was collected from Facebook threads relating to six purposively sampled episodes of a local soap opera, *Scandal*, which depict different forms of intimate partner violence perpetrated against the character of Gloria, by her second husband, Obakeng. Soap opera is the "hook", the trigger, to the social media talk. Methodologically, the study utilised an emerging online research method, netnography, that enabled the researcher to immerse on the social media platform to gain a deeper insight into the social media chat. The study is grounded in a feminist theoretical framework that places women at the centre. What does "social media talk" reveal in terms of participants' awareness of intimate partner violence? The thesis turned on this central research question. Crucially, the study demonstrates that talk, discourse and conversation are moving more and more onto social media platforms, and hence social justice activism – if it is to remain relevant – will have to follow the conversation. It foregrounds how we can, as it were, follow the conversation, and what we can learn from such following of the conversation. At the same time, it sheds light on the possibilities and limits of, on the one hand, social media talk and, on the other hand, representation of gender violence. The study thus represents a new paradigm of attending to social discourse. The study also found that soap opera audiences on social media talk in a diversity of ways that may or may not conform to Facebook's terms of service and to the needs of soap opera marketing teams. At the same time, the social media talk demonstrated differences in expressive styles as well as differing perspectives and differences of opinion. The platform could be used to express tame or dissenting views. The main finding suggests that we need to pause and engage in a deeper conversation and reflection about the quality and direction of the conversation on social media. The impressive conclusions about social media talk stood in stark contrast to the realities of gender violence on the ground.

Acronyms

ARPANET	Advanced Research Projects Agency Network
ARV	Antiretroviral
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
GBV	Gender-based-violence
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
(OTT)	Over-the-top content
SABC	South Africa Broadcasting Corporation
UN	United Nations
UseNet	User Generated Content
VAW	Violence against women
VDR	Video Digital Recorders
WHO	World Health Organisation

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Gender violence, particularly violence against women, is a critical, historical issue in South Africa (Abrahams, Mathews, Martin, Lombard and Jewkes 2012[1]; Gqola 2015; Lowstedt 2015). What Gqola (2015:79) calls "the manufacture of female fear" is a historical phenomenon which uses "the threat of rape and other bodily wounding". Female bodies have faced very specific forms and genealogies of wounding, surveillance, control, punishment, mutilation and structural violence reproduced by successive forms of patriarchy, sexism and misogyny. Such violence against female bodies was specifically built into slavery, empire, colonialism and apartheid as part of a generalised violence against blackbodies (Gqola 2015:45). It has, however, metamorphosed into a variety of forms, some old and some new, in the "New" South Africa. For instance, bodily wounding of women takes the form of femicide. Lowstedt (2015) defines femicide as "the intentional targeting of women and girls with lethal force because they are girls and women."

In 2017, the South Africa media and public discourse was awash with stories of femicide, sparked by the murder of 22-year old Karabo Mokoena. The murders of Ntombizodwa Dlamini, Zolile Khumalo, Amanda Tweyi, Jabulile Nhlapo, and Siam Lee also made recent headlines. However, the epidemic seems to have begun to peak around 2013, with the murder of Anene Booysen by her boyfriend.[2] A large number of femicides in South Africa occur at the hands of intimate partners, with the most recent

[1] Abrahams, N, Mathews, S, Martin, L, Lombard, C, & Jewkes, R (01-08-2012) "Every eight hours: Intimate femicide in South Africa 10 years later!" http://www.mrc.ac.za/policy-briefs/every-eight-hours-intimate-femicide-south-africa-10-years-later/ Accessed 10 December 2017.

[2] September, C. (31-102013). "The Anene Booysen Story", *Eye Witness News*, http://ewn.co.za/2013/10/31/The-Anene-Booysen-Story Accessed 15 September 2016

data suggesting that one such murder takes place every 8 hours (Abrahams et al 2012). The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined intimate partner violence as:

> (A)ny behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in that relationship. It includes acts of physical aggression (slapping, hitting, kicking or beating), psychological abuse (intimidation, constant belittling or humiliation), forced sexual intercourse or any other controlling behaviour (isolating a person from family and friends, monitoring their movements and restricting access to information or assistance).[3]

Abrahams et al (2012), on the other hand, have simply defined intimate femicide or intimate partner femicide as the "Killing of women by intimate partners (i.e., a current or former husband/boyfriend, same-sex partner, or rejected would-be lover)". A 2016 health and demographic study uncovers that one in every five women over the age of 18 has experienced physical violence (Sibanda-Moyo, Konje and Brobbey 2017:10). This figure is considered higher in the poorest areas of South Africa where one in three women reports physical violence. In 2017 the wave of femicide spawned controversial responses such as #MenAreTrash. What these statistics, definitions, headlines and hashtags reveal and reflect in the main is that violence against women (VAW) takes specific forms, but also that such violence can be safely described as endemic (Sibanda-Moyo et al 2017:12; Mogale, Barns and Richter 2012). These preliminary thoughts are important for framing my study on discourses surrounding the representation of intimate partner violence.

There are statutory prohibitions against committing violence against women, as expressed in two signal pieces of South African legislation, namely the Domestic Violence Act No 116 of 1998 and the Criminal Law Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act No 32 of 2007. However, some studies have suggested that court outcomes "insult or ridicule" the laws rather than respect and abide by them (Mogale et al 2012). Essentially, it is thought that the courts are not doing enough to uphold the law or to show the way in terms of how to end the epidemic of violence against women.

[3] WHO (n.d.) "Intimate partner violence and alcohol", http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/factsheets/fs_intimate.pdf Accessed 4 May 2018.

Studies have thus recommended novel interventions that may help to curb violence against women *apart from* what the slow-moving wheels of the courts can do. Such interventions include considering the granular and ineffable nature of violence against women, particularly in every day contexts and spaces. This effort urges, for instance, for understanding the sociocultural nature of gender violence. Other interventions include exploring the critical role that the media can play in educating audiences *against* violence against women. The seminal example of #MenAreTrash alluded to above points to the sites where such discourses are emerging and circulating: social media. This study is an attempt to explore the role that social media plays both in our conception and misconception of violence against women. Social media has been described as *a high-octane word of mouth* (Bell 2010: 11). In my study, therefore, I examine how we talk about violence against women using this high-octane word of mouth, and what these kinds of talk reveal about personal, social, cultural and moral attitudes towards VAW.

Year	SA rate/100,000 women	Data source	WHO global average rate/100,000
1999	24.7	MRC	–
2000	21.4	WHO	3.3
2005	17.3	WHO	2.9
2009	12.9	MRC	–
2010	13.4	WHO	2.6
2015	9.6	WHO	2.4

FigTable 1.1: South Africa's rate of femicide as at 2015. (Source: Africacheck.org)

Essentially, a core aspect of the discourse of violence against women is not just to highlight the extent and complexity of the problem but to tease out rigorous explanations that may lead us closer and closer to eradicating the epidemic. One

aspect of the search for explanations, in my view, is to examine how society talks about violence against women. Scholars have shown the relationship between language, discourse and meaning (Wodak 1997; Fairclough 2013: 7). Language is "man-made" and a carrier of ideas, whereas discourse focuses primarily on the meaning of talk or text (Cameron 1990:14; Mills 2008: 43; Cook 2008). Reality is constructed through naming and defining (Mills 2008: 43) – a process from which women have historically been excluded. Mills (*ibid*) regards language as a system which benefits and accords value to the experiences and beliefs of men more than those of women. Spender (1980:84) argues that by altering the terms within a language which seem to represent women negatively, one also potentially transforms the way that women are normatively thought about. It is my view that how people talk about an issue such as gender violence, the meanings they attach to it, and the way they represent it in language, is crucial to getting a nuanced view of not only what motivates violence against women but also how to deal with it. Currently, the best place to find people talking about an issue *in a certain way* (or ways) is, without doubt, the high-octane word of mouth: social media.

Social media refers to a specific set of Internet-based, networked communication platforms which enable public and personal communication (Meikle 2016:x). These include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Fuchs (2016: 7) points out that when referring to social media, we must specify which term and form of *social* we are employing. Hunsinger and Senft (2014: 1) liken social media to a "community space" which they describe as "networked information services designed to support in-depth social interaction, community formation, collaborative opportunities and collaborative work". It is where information is "passed from one person to another along social connections, to create a distributed discussion or community". I believe that the networked way in which information is shared and passed from one person to another via social media replicates the way thoughts and ideas about VAW are spread and dispersed from person to person, and from networked device to networked device.

The choice of social media in this study is the ubiquitous Facebook. Facebook joins together at least three levels of *sociality* which are: cognition (that is, creating a multimedia content such as video and publishing it), communication (commenting, "Liking", and "following"), and cooperation (where others create and manipulate and

remix the content). This study is more concerned with the communicative level, where I examine what sort of meanings were being communicated, how, and why. Fuchs explains that at this communicative level a sense of community is created, complete with sustained social interaction and a sense of familiarity. That is, there is a sense of belonging (Fuchs 2017: 45). Indeed, this model of human sociality appears to emphasise that when humans socialise, they inevitably influence one another and change their "knowledge structures" (Fuchs 2017: 45). The presence of the community was thus critical to reading, examining and understanding the "talk" and discourse in question. To illustrate the crucial factor of community, (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013) describe social media as "spreadable media". They contend that "if it doesn't spread, it's dead" (Jenkins et al 2013: 1). Like I intimated above, violence against women is also spreading at alarming proportions in South Africa (see Fig 1 above). If people are talking on social media, perhaps a study of how ideas about VAW spread might also go there?

And just what this talk is all about is curiously interesting, hence this study. At any rate, the study of digital and network technologies is one of the fastest and growing fields of research (Lyman and Wakeford 1999:359). For instance, Mazibuko (2017) notes that Facebook is used by one billion people daily in the world and two billion people per month worldwide. In South Africa 16 million people access Facebook every month, making Facebook an interesting site for study. This study was inspired by Facebook thread discussing a series of television soap opera episodes that depict violence against a woman character. The show is etv's *Scandal*, which shows the character of Gloria being abused across several episodes by her intimate partner, Obakeng. Claims have been made, not least by its owners, that Facebook gives users power to build communities and bring the world closer together. The study sought to test this through examining this thread of chats about the etv episode. The idea is to establish just what kind of knowledge and meanings are being produced about violence against women on this thread, as well as how such knowledge and meanings are being produced. Do people think and say what they say on social media because they are on social media? Is talk on social media the same as talk off social media? How does social media influence how we talk about social issues? Indeed, does it influence how we talk at all?

Social media may not be to everyone's taste, though. A prominent critic is billionaire businessman, George Soros who spoke at the World Economic Forum in January 2018, disputing that social media does us any good.[4] Rather, he regarded Facebook as a sinister online gambling den. He stated:

> Something very harmful and maybe irreversible is happening to human attention in our digital age. Not just distraction or addiction; social media companies are inducing people to give up their autonomy. The power to shape people's attention is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few companies. It takes a real effort to assert and defend what John Stuart Mill called "the freedom of mind." There is a possibility that once lost, people who grow up in the digital age will have difficulty in regaining it. This may have far-reaching political consequences. People without the freedom of mind can be easily manipulated. This danger does not loom only in the future; it already played an important role in the 2016 US presidential elections.[5]

Social media are here seen as agents of mind-control, which seek to influence our behaviour for the ulterior motives of corporations. The nature of this influence needs to be examined. One way of examining it is through social media talk, a core focus of this study. Is social media harmless or is it addictive and dangerous? How much power does social Facebook have over us? Does it have any power at all? How does this influence work with different users? These are some of the questions that this study attempts to answer by examining the stresses and fault lines of discourse on a specific Facebook thread.

This study recognises that many topics of discussion on social media are triggered by what goes on elsewhere, often offline, thus generating trends. One trigger of discussion of social media discussion, of instance, is old media, such as television. Hence, this study examines the convergence of a social issue, a social medium, and

[4] Soros, G. (25 January 2018). "Remarks delivered at the World Economic Forum", https://www.georgesoros.com/2018/01/25/remarks-delivered-at-the-world-economic-forum/ Accessed 6 March 2018.

[5] Soros, G. (2018-01-25). "Remarks delivered at the World Economic Forum", https://www.georgesoros.com/2018/01/25/remarks-delivered-at-the-world-economic-forum/ Accessed 6 March 2018.

a television programme, in order to see what meanings such a cocktail throws up. The Gloria/Obakeng gender violence episodes of the soap opera, *Scandal*, are chosen here precisely because, as Gqola (2015:154) says, "[e]xamples illustrate best, they can work as evidence". Essentially, we turn to examples "for recognition and illumination". The selected episodes of *Scandal* function as an instrumental case study, opening up the way to the broader discussion of attitudes towards, and meaning-making about, intimate partner violence. The study thus examines, on the one hand, *how* people talk about important social issues such as gender violence on social media, why they talk this way, and the implications of this "talk" for understanding social relations and, on the other hand, the three-way convergence of "old" media, "new" media and social forms of talk. Such a study is important because society is still grappling with the implications of the "network society" (Castells 2009:5) and is still trying to make sense of what is *really* going on. The proliferation of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram has added a further layer of complexity onto the already complex network society. As we saw above in the Soros and Wylie examples, there is already an active and polarising debate going on about what is *really* going on in the worlds of social media. My study is a contribution to a study of that question.

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg has commented that "we exist at the *intersection* of technology and social issues" (Lee, 2011: xiii). The notion of *intersection* of technology and sociality, in as far as it has theoretical validity, aptly captures the focus and spirit of my study, which investigates the nature of Facebook chat by audiences who watched the *representation* of violence against a prominent female character on *Scandal*. *What* are people talking about, and *how* and *why* do they talk about it? What, if anything, should we learn from all this? Broadly the study is about the three-way *intersection* of apparently "new" social forms of talk, television, and new (social) forms of media, in particular Facebook, which currently has over a billion customers *talking* on its platforms (Couldry 2011:236).

As noted, my study intersects "old" media (television, soap opera) and "new" media (social media, Facebook). Most television programmes now have social media presence in the form of a Twitter handle, a Facebook and Instagram page, and so on, in order to allow audiences to "Like", "love", "up vote", and "follow" them". Indeed, a

number of scholars of television have started to argue that *the television medium* is no longer what we know it to be at all, where the family would converge as a unit in a room to watch programmes and shows (Wohn and Kyung Na 2011). Rather, a lot of this integrated family television viewing seems to have been interminably *fragmented* into many channels offering specialised niche viewing and, in the age of social media and *interactivity*, seem to have been *overlaid* (some would say *replaced*) by what is known as *social television* (Cesar and Geerts 2011; Owen 1999).

But what is "social television"? Social television is when television viewers fragmented and disconnected by distance and physical and social geography *interact* with each *via* social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to share their television experience via smart phones, tablets, or laptops. Using these devices now popularly called "second screens" to share viewer experience through the social networking sites is a strategy to increase audience *involvement* (Soros, above, calls this "addiction") and contributes to the success of many contemporary television shows (Greer and Ferguson (2011); Ytreberg 2009; Gross; Fetter; Paul-Stuev, 2008). Indeed, it is rare – if not impossible – to find a television show today that has no social media presence. Yet, barely fifteen years ago, social media itself was hardly known. Neither Twitter nor Instagram had been established, and smartphones were rare. The kinds of social media connectedness that we take for granted today, including the culture of emojis and selfies, was virtually unknown. Social television has thus arisen on the coat tails of social media, as it were. Knowing others are watching "creates the feeling of connectivity and opportunities for conversation and social interaction" (Thompson 1995). Social television, in a deeper sense, is characterised by the coming together of television and social media where thousands, hundreds of thousands, and even millions of viewers now share their television experience (Muellner 2013).

What does social television imply – if anything – for the discussion of important social issues such as, for example, violence against women? What does it change? What remains the same? Why? In this study, I argue that this new television *experience* that arises on the coattails of social media has inevitably brought about another form of "talk" – in fact *forms* of talk, in the plural – on Facebook and Twitter, different to and distinct from that of the living room and other physical sites such as verandas, bus stops, trains, bars and so on where people (television audiences) would traditionally

discuss television fare. Such new talk is “virtual” and happens on a third-party proprietary platform – the so-called cloud. This “talk” usually happens in real time just as the television programme is on air, or after, for days, weeks and months, and even years. To the best of my knowledge, not much systematic comment and analysis has attended the growth and proliferation of this form of social media “talk”. Indeed, a Nexus survey showed that no current South African studies have grappled with the question either precisely or generally. Is the talk on social media the same as the unmediated talk in people’s living rooms? What are the continuities and ruptures, and the similarities and differences? What will these continuities and ruptures teach us about the evolution, or not, of patterns of discourse? What could we learn about the relationship between media and social life? Mboti (2016) suggests that one of the reasons why fans of *Khumbul ekhaya* (a reality television show on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) 1 channel that aims to reunite lost family members in South Africa) use the show’s Facebook page is simply the *desire* to reach and connect with a wider, *real time* audience. Although viewers turn to the Khumbul ekhaya Facebook page anticipating that other users who are logged in may help them locate their lost relatives, the mere need to respond to other watchers who enjoy the same programme, and be responded to by those same watchers, appears to be a key psychosocial motivator. Kozinets (2010: 2), who coined the term *netnography* to refer to ethnography applied to the study of online cultures and communities, asserts that the only way we can understand what is happening online is to study what goes in that “world”.

Social television viewing has led to a massive and rapidly expanding *real-time focus group* that was previously not possible during the pre-social media and old media era (Nightingale and Dwyer 2006). Television audience *chat* of the kind seen today on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and even WhatsApp was, quite clearly, non-existent in the pre-social media era because information flow was one way circa 2005. There was just no way for audiences in different places to simultaneously connect on a single platform and talk about their favourite programmes or their viewing experiences. During the pre-social media era it was common for audiences to talk about what they have just watched on television. However, they did so in the home, amongst friends, relatives and colleagues, in queues, on public transport, in letters to the editor sections, focus groups, and so on (Mittell, 2004: xi). Audience and reception studies

traditionally have been based on studying these kinds of localised audiences. Social media seems to have succeeded in amplifying these conversations which previous generations could not do because they could not share with the world in the same manner ([6]Sefotlhelo 2016). The phenomenon where audiences all over the country or all over the world can constitute one huge real-time focus group talking about the same programme or episode is a completely new experience and phenomenon both for audience and the field of reception studies.

1.2 Motivation and justification of study

This study investigated how television audiences talked, commented about and discussed specific social issues on social media, in this case, the representation of violence against women, with the intention of proposing a new interpretive lens of socially relevant "social media talk". The issue of violence against women was purposively selected firstly because of its topicality in contemporary South Africa and, secondly, because of the varied political, social, religious and cultural perspectives, even controversies, that it generates. Gender violence, and VAW in particular, is an important contemporary social change theme which has not been rewarded with adequate attention from communication studies perspectives. The United Nations 1993 formally adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, specifically condemning gender violence as a violation of human rights (Joachim 2007: 1).

The Gloria/Obakeng domestic violence storyline on *etv* itself coincided with the 16 Days of Activism, an internationally recognised day aimed at eradicating violence against women. As I will show in Chapter 2 this was not a coincidence. Rather, the storyline was part of *Scandal's* efforts to use contemporary issues as a focal point and, indeed, as part of an edutainment or infotainment agenda to influence public opinion (Gaines 2015). McQuail (2010:548) observes that the more a topic is made prominent in the media the greater the chances it will get attention from the audience (mainly what it thinks about it). McQuail further notes that by focusing on social issues the media has the potential to highlight the importance and relation of social media to

[6] Sefotlhelo, T. (2016-09-08). "Taking the conversation out of boardrooms and back to the people". https://themediaonline.co.za/2016/09/taking-the-conversation-out-of-boardrooms-and-back-to-the-people/ Accessed 22 September 2016.

social change. This was part of the thinking behind etv's producers creating the episodes that represented violence against women. I assumed that social media offer previously unavailable opportunities for new and surprising kinds of social discourse. It is the nature of this social discourse that I was interested in investigating, since a scholarly and theoretical gap exists in terms of systematic studies that link social media (online) and social issues ("offline").

1.2.1 Contribution to new knowledge

Despite the important observations about the structural changes brought about by "social television", little is yet known about the actual nature of viewer chat. It is not known, for instance, *how* or *if* social media has changed the way people *talk* about what they see on television. Further unknowns in this regard concern the content and quality of the discussions on social media threads. What kinds of *knowledge* and *meanings* are being generated on social media threads? How *different* or *similar* are these to the kinds of knowledge generated in pre-social media era "talk"? Indeed, how are meanings generated on social media? Furthermore, the phenomenon of social media chat is unique because it is located on a third-party platform, with its own constraints. The nature of these constraints and how they *alter* communication has not been systematically investigated. For instance, how does social media discussion alter the way discussants read the world, if at all? How different is social media talk from talk in the real world? This study applied and tested all these unknowns by studying how audiences of a local soapie, *Scandal*, talked about gender violence.

The study proposed that discussion threads on social media constituted a specific mode of "talk" different to all other forms of "talk" that we had been used to pre-social media. Erving Goffman, for instance, in *Forms of Talk* (1981:3), could not have theorised about "social media talk" as a form of talk simply because this form of talk did not exist in the 1980s. While he could speculate about it, he could not know about it. It is thus a privilege to be able to study this emerging, peculiarly 21st century form of discourse that is centred on social media apps. Goffman postulates three forms of talk, namely "ritualization", "participation framework", and "embedding". It seems quite clear that Goffman's three "frame-analytic themes" are important but inadequate to a study of how social media audiences talk today. Unlike Goffman, this study was privileged to have actual examples to use, such as Facebook and Twitter audiences.

Most media commentators and scholars appear to agree that social media has radically changed the way audiences interact with television programming. Some have even questioned if the concept of audiences is still relevant in the new media era (Ang, 1996:57). When people post something on Facebook or tweet a post it remains unclear whether these people can be described as audiences or producers of information (Nightingale 2011:4). As illustration of how "social media talk" happens and the various complex forms it takes, the study drew on specific forms of Facebook "talk" by audiences of e-tv's Serial, *Scandal*. The "talk" centred around six episodes (2129, 2146, 2153, 2162, 2164, 2186) of violence perpetrated against a female character, Gloria, by her second husband Obakeng, between 17 November 2014 and February 04 2015 (Gaines, 2015).

1.3 Rationale

This study is unique for the way it proposes and explores not just the notion of "social media talk", illustrating this phenomenon with a close reading of actual audiences of a local soapie, but for the way it attempts to answer some of the unknowns regarding social television. Soap operas "constitute one of the most popular and resilient forms of storytelling ever devised" (Allen 2001:1). In 1920 when soap operas were introduced, they were mainly sponsored by soap manufacturers targeting housewives. Although soap operas are still overwhelmingly targeting women, they are no longer simply viewed as some form of "trash" by critics. Soap operas now provide entertainment to a broad-based mass audience of both men and women (Ang, 1985:56). The growth of soap operas is the reason why since the 1980's the genre is increasingly being used to address social issues and scholars taking a serious interest in their studies (Geraghty 2001:76). The soap operas' association with audience, which broadcasters perceive as a source of potential revenue through advertisements, is also what makes the genre popular (Ang, 1991:4). There is obviously a strong link between soap operas and television. Downstream, this study sets up questions about the potential role of media, such as television, to promote specific kinds of social change. In sum, this study is a multi-perspective exploration that brings key concepts of "talk", social media/Facebook, soap opera/audience, and gender-based-violence into the spotlight.

I chose *Scandal* as a focus of study because it is one of the longest running television dramas in South Africa, having been shown since 2005 (Gaines 2015). It states on its about section that it is a prime time show largely set within the revamped/rebranded Jozi media house NFH, the company that produces the gritty and gloss-glam magazine *Scandal* and the cutting-edge newspaper, The New Voice. Its plot outline is based on pressured "professional and personal lives of management and journalists" colliding "as they rush to find exclusives, meet deadlines, push to make the big bucks and increase sales." It is shown Monday to Friday at 19.30 and Saturday omnibus at 09.30 am. An omnibus is a collection of all the episodes shown during Monday to Friday. On its home page producers of *Scandal* recap the previous night's show and provide a synopsis of what to expect on that day's evening show. The producers also post photos and videos about the soap opera on the page. The conversation about the coming episodes or the previous night's shows usually begins there with people sharing, liking and commenting about content uploaded on the soap opera's Facebook home page as shown below.

Figure1.1 Screenshot of the Facebook Fan page (Source: Author)

On the Facebook page, the Soapie states that it won the Royalty Soapie Awards 2015 when some of its actors and actresses where rewarded for their outstanding

performances. These included Masasa Mbangeni acting as Themebeka Shezi who was named as the leading actress; Andile Sithole as Ndumiso Ngcobo in *Scandal* who got the Outstanding Supporting Actor award and Mapaseka Koelle known as Dinthle Seluke in the soap opera who was awarded the Outstanding Supporting Actress prize. In the 2015 South African Film and Television Awards, Majorie Langa, acting as Gloria and the central character in the episodes under focus in this study, received the Best Supporting Actress on a TV soap for her role in *Scandal.*

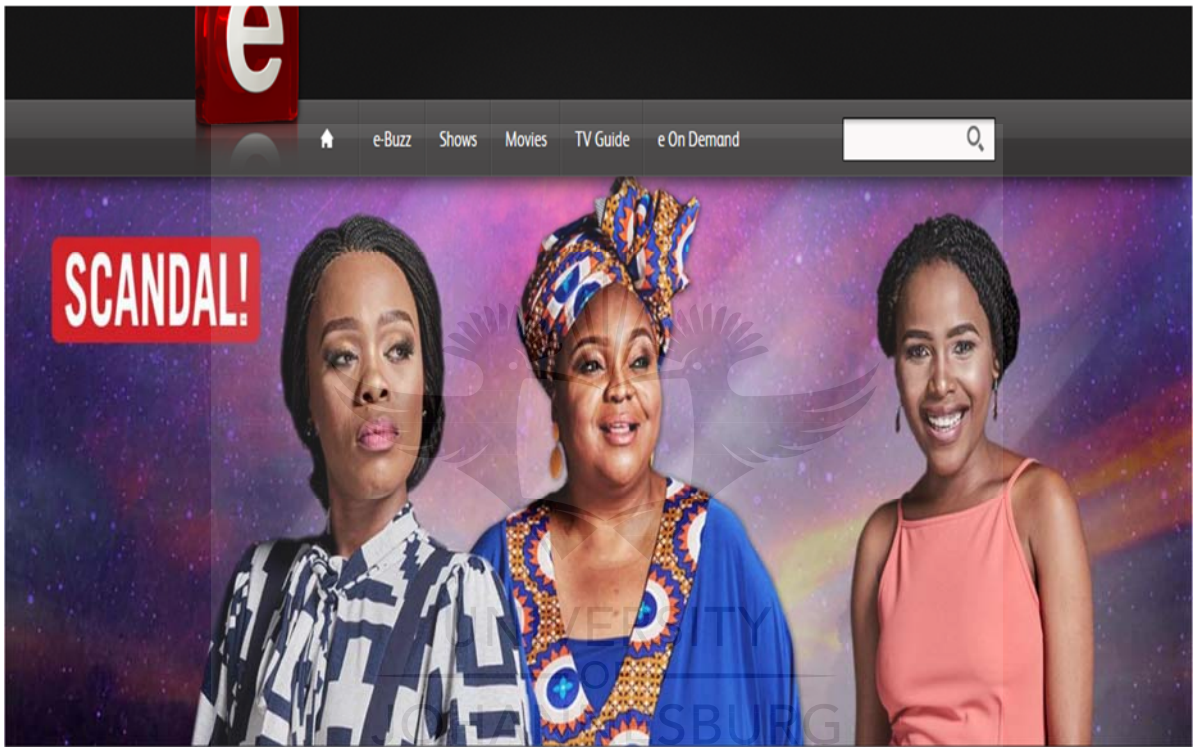


Fig. 1.2: Screenshot of Scandal marketing itself through some of its characters (Source: author)

Scandal is set in a newsroom and centred on the personal lives of the staff that works in that newsroom. Spence (2001:183) alludes to the fact that relating soap operas to "real" people in a "knowable landscape" appeals to viewers who enjoy watching people and places that they are familiar with. Spence further explains that this gives texts a "real life" effect. *Scandal* was viewed mostly by adults from the age of 25 years old, 60 percent of whom were women (Gaines 2015). In addition to the fact that *Scandal* has been showing on etv for a decade, the soap opera genre gives viewers something to talk about because of the way they are structured – for instance, the "endless narratives" (Brunsdon, 2000: 173). Hobson in Brunsdon (2000:10) notes that the study

of soap operas as a genre has mainly been centred on the texts or as part of television studies. My study is curious to explore the conversation that ensues after the showing of a soap opera, in this case the episodes on violence against Gloria.

1.4 Research questions

The study investigated the nature of Facebook chat that takes place after the showing of the television episodes about violence against women (VAW) on etv's soapie *Scandal.* [7]Abrahams et al (2013) state that:

> Violence against women (often referred to as gender-based violence) is common, serious, and takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and has profound implications for every aspect of women's lives. One of the most common forms of violence is perpetrated by a husband or male partner (often referred to as intimate partner violence), and as it usually happens in private, is often ignored or goes unreported.

The study thus focused on intimate partner violence drawn from a given sample of episodes cited above that audience reacted to on social media. The episodes related to physical, verbal and psychological abuse subjected to Gloria by her second husband, Obakeng.

The study sought to address the question: What is the nature of the talk on Facebook in reaction to the episodes of violence meted on Gloria on the soapie, *Scandal*? To address this question fully, the following four extended research questions are pertinent:

1. What sort of meanings about gender violence are generated and circulated on *Scandal*'s Facebook page?
2. How different (or similar) is social media talk about VAW from talk about VWA in the real world?
3. Why are audiences talking in the way they are doing on social media about VAW?

[7] Abrahams, N, Mathews, S, Martin, L, Lombard, C, & Jewkes, R. (02-04-2013). "Intimate Partner Femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009". https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001412/ Accessed 02 August 2017.

4. How does social media discussion alter the way discussants read the “worlds” and contexts of VAW, if at all?

Scandal’s typical Facebook social media marketing landing page

1.5 Chapter delineation

The study has seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background and introduction to the study, including the motivation, rationale, and justification, as well as the research questions. The chapter discusses the study and contextualises the key elements of the study. Chapter 2 presents the literature review. This chapter discusses previous studies relevant to the topic of social media talk, television, soap operas, audience, and gender violence. Chapter 3 is the theoretical framework chapter of the study. It discusses theories linked to online identity, representation as well as an overview of black feminism, cyber feminism and postmodern feminism. Chapter 4 presents the study’s research design and methodology. The chapter looks at how data was collected and analysed. Chapter 5 presents findings and analysis related to social media talk and discusses findings specific to the discussion of violence against women. The final chapter of the study is Chapter 7, which presents the conclusions and outlines possible directions for future studies in the area of gendered and social media “talk”.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on eight interlinked themes, namely violence against women, new media, social media, television, soap operas, television audiences, social television and "talk". Each of these issues is treated separately in relation to the state of research in these fields and current salient debates. Further relevant ancillary topics are also reviewed and foregrounded. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a sufficient scholarly background to the interpretation of data in the subsequent findings chapters.

2.2 Gender-based-violence and violence against women

The *Scandal* episodes of domestic violence that form the instrumental case study for this research were produced as part of the 16 Days of Activism in 2014 (Gaines 2015 interview). The 16 days are marked from November 25 to December 10 of each year as extensions of the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (Smith 2005). The particular day was chosen after three sisters Patricia, Minerva and Maria Teresa were brutally beaten and strangled to death on November 25 1960 in the Dominican Republic[8]. The women were on their way to visit their husbands who had been imprisoned for their participation in a resistance movement. The 16 days also include World AIDS Day on December 01, as well as December 6 to commemorate the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre when a man gunned down 14 engineering students for "being feminists". Antrobus (2004: 94) explains that the 16 days of activism "establishes a context in which women can express zero tolerance for violence". In some countries, such activism has been successfully used to get governments to "pay attention" to violations of women's human rights and take action to protect women. Campaigns are increasingly being seen as the most effective way of breaking the silence that often shrouds the subject of violence against women to raise awareness and help to change attitudes, policies and practices. South Africa first

[8]Alter, C. (2014-11-25). "The Brutal Triple Murder Behind the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women". http://time.com/3603582/international-day-to-end-violence-against-women/ Accessed 22 November 2018.

adopted the campaign in 1998 as one of the intervention strategies towards creating a society free of violence. The South African Government's website states that the country decided in 2014 that activism against violence on women should not just be confined to the 16 days. As such, the government adopted "365 Days for No Violence against Women and Children" (#365Days campaign) and "#CountMeIn", among other campaigns. South Africa also recognises August of each year as Women's Month.

The United Nations describes gender-based violence as violence that affects women disproportionately (Izumi 2007:14). Gender-based-violence, therefore, is an umbrella term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the unequal power relations and the normative role expectations associated with each gender in any given society. This study is more concerned with violence targeted at women because it assumes that "they have experiences of harm that is more distinctive" (Sibanda-Moyo et al 2017: 8). Of course, men and women face violence of different kinds of degrees, and both equally need protection from violence. Article 3 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) states that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person". Article 5 also reads, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Izumi 2007: 14 Joachim 2007:5). Scholars of violence such as Zizek (2007) show that violence within a neoliberal order is generalised to the whole society (cf. Mboti 2014). That is, violence will affect you, whether you are a man or a woman. Some men face violence at the hands of other men, while other face violence at the hands of women (Izumi 2007:15). These kinds of gendered violence are worth studying too. However, gender violence against women is assumed to be most common in social settings that defer to patriarchal norms. The *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993), for instance, is focused on a specific form of violence against women. A further aspect of violence against women that attracts the attention of scholars and advocacy groups is the fact that violence against women goes frequently beyond immediate physical damage to the victim (Izumi 2007:14). Izumi further notes that psychological and psychosocial damage, and the threat of further violence, contributes to the erosion of a woman's self-esteem, inhibiting her ability to defend herself or act against her abuser. This psychosocial effect of gender violence against women tends to be more systemic and subtler. And because they are harder to notice, they are also harder to diagnose and treat.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines the term violence against women in Article 1 as “Any act of gender-based-violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Ennaji and Sadiqi 2011). Basically, such violence is a form of psychological, physical, sexual or economic abuse directed against women and girls because of their real or perceived subordinate status in society. This study draws on this definition extensively, while also modifying it where necessary. The importance of this particular definition for my study is that it draws attention to gender violence *within* both the private and the public spaces. The *talk* about gender violence on social media tended to draw on notions of violence in the context of private and public spheres. The representation of violence on *Scandal* also tended to cross and intersperse the public and the private.

The UN has further expanded the definition of gender-based-violence to refer to violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, including systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy; forced sterilisation, forced abortion, coerced or forced use of contraceptives; prenatal sex selection and female infanticide. It further recognises the vulnerabilities of women from minority backgrounds, the elderly and the displaced, the indigenous, refugees, and migrant communities, the disabled, and women living in impoverished rural or remote areas, or in detention. Carrillo (1991:42), who was able to frame violence against women as a development issue in the 90s, argues that “gender violence interferes with women’s own personal development by limiting their ability to pursue options in almost every area including the home, schools, workplaces, and most public spaces.” It is this constant *interference* with a woman’s full humanity that the study found to be salient about Obakeng’s brand of violence in the six *Scandal* episodes under review. Carrillo further argues that gender violence “prevents women from contributing effectively to the economic development of a country because of its severe health and psychological impact”. These aspects of gender violence show that it is both complex and serious, and merits systematic study.

2.2.1 Violence against women (VAW) in South Africa

The discussion on gender-based violence in South Africa is critical due to the near epidemic status it has reached. The recorded murder rate of 24.7 per 100 000 females in South Africa is significantly higher than global levels (Abrahams et al 2013). These figures could be way higher if one considers that most cases go unreported. Between one-in-five and one-in-three women in South Africa have suffered violence in their lifetime with 40 to 60 percent men disclosing that they have perpetrated violence against women (Abrahams et al 2013). In Chapter 1 we noted that a woman is killed by her intimate partner every eight hours, more or less, in the country (Abrahams et al 2012). In 1995 when South Africa held its first national conference on violence against women in Cape Town, statistics indicated that one in six women was killed by an intimate partner (Pillay 2010:68).

Violence against women in South Africa, interestingly, cuts across all races, class, socio economic standing and educational background. Pillay (2010:67) describes violence against women as the "biggest oppression" facing most South African women. This is truer if one defines violence in its systemic aspects that include poverty, lack of education and lack of access to health, housing and other basic necessities. This is because women suffer intersectionally from the so-called triple burdens of violence. Historically, South African women suffered the "double jeopardy" (Beal, 1970), in particular as victims of patriarchy, and as second class citizens under apartheid (cf. Maseko 2017; Mboti 2013). The condition of double and triple oppression was also visible in many women's role as domestic workers for white families (cf Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation*, 1980). As such, it is axiomatic that black women suffered the triple jeopardy of being female, black and poor (cf. Hassim 1991).

In spite of its "epidemic" status in South Africa, however, violence against women is typically underreported, particularly in mainstream media (Willis 2017).[9] This is despite the fact that it accounts for more than 50 percent of all murders of women in South Africa (Willis 2017). Willis claims less than 20 percent of all femicides in South Africa

[9] Willis, A. (2017- 05-18) Media reports would have you believe there is an Increase gender-based violence, but there Isn't. Less than 20 percent of all femicides that happen every year are covered in the press. https://bit.ly/2Eo2CUo / Accessed 10 April 2018

are reported in the South African press annually. When femicides are eventually reported and mainstreamed in media discourse, it is often the case that they involve high profile women, as happened in the case of the death of Reeva Steenkamp, a South African top model who was killed by her boyfriend, former South Africa Paralympics Oscar Pistorius on Valentine's Day in 2013 (Willis 2017), or because they have become some convenient *cause celebre*, as happened in the case of Karabo Mokoena. The framing of violence against women in the media appears to have a bearing on public online discourse, as we shall see in the Findings chapter. Social media talk, in part, reflects how mainstream media talks about gender violence.

Yet, the problem of VAW is not just a South African problem, nor is it a purely recent phenomenon. Scholars such as Löwstedt (2015) have traced the genealogy of VAW to apartheid. The effect of domestic violence on nations, communities and families, though difficult to quantify *precisely*, is regarded as enormous (Kurst, Swanger and Petcosky 2003: 8). Globally, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused by an intimate partner in her lifetime (Joachim 2007:103). Such statistics played a role in the United Nations' adoption of the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women* in 1993, a declaration that, as we saw, condemned and drew attention to gender violence within both the private and the public spheres (Joachim 2007:1). Specifically, violence against women was categorised as a violation of human rights, identified as a universal problem, and duly criminalised.

The *initial* impetus for the recognition of domestic violence as a social problem, though, appears to have started in the 1970's through the efforts of the global women's and feminist movement. (Joachim 2007:122; Antrobus 2004:29). As a research problem, it was not until the middle of the 20th century that serious and systematic academic inquiries commenced (Kurst Swanger and Petcosky 2003: 27). The 1993 meeting succeeded in placing VAW on the agenda of the human rights conference for the first time (Antrobus 2004:94). Before then violence against women and reproductive rights and health were treated as domestic and private. The linkage of women's rights and human rights was a powerful frame for mobilising an international constituency against a structural and systemic problem. It was successful in that it resonated with women in different cultural contexts (Joachim 2007:124).

The studies presented at the 1993 meeting, offered, for the first time, systematic evidence that violence against women was an international, underreported and *structural* problem caused by the vulnerable, precarious and low status of most women, particularly in the developing world. Data from across the world indicated that *the home* was by far the most dangerous place for women and frequently the site of cruelty, trauma and torture (Joachim 2007: 104). Fifty percent of women in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Peru, for instance, had been subjected to violence. Specific provisions have also been made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets out an agenda to prevent, eradicate, and punish violence against women and girls (Ennaji and Sadiqi 2011). Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practise. They commit to submitting national reports on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. South Africa is a signatory to these statutory instruments (Sibanda-Moyo et al 2017:20).

Incidentally, there is no one single type of violence against women. Rather, multiple forms converge to create a very complex problem. Abuse can be emotional and intangible, where it includes what Gqola (2015:80) calls the “manufacture of fear”:

> The manufacture of female fear requires several aspects to work: the safety of the aggressor, the vulnerability of the target, the successful communication by the aggressor that he has power to wound, rape and/or kill the target with no consequences to himself. Women are socialised to look away from the female fear factory – to pretend it is not happening and to flee when ignoring it becomes impossible. Patriarchy trains us all to be receptive to the conditions that produce – and reproduce – female fear, especially when it is not our own bodies on the assembly line.

Fear is manufactured, for instance, through threats of physical harm, denial or deprivation of financial resources, an attitude of excessive surveillance and possessiveness and other behaviours of control that result in women suffering a loss self-worth, dignity and self-esteem, confidence and independence (Mega et al, 2000). Physical abuse, on the other hand, may be defined as slapping, punching, kicking, pushing, grabbing, shoving, pulling out hair and hitting (Mega et al 2000). The authors

further note that serious forms include burning, shooting, stabbing, beating with objects such as hammer, baseball bat or belt causing deaths, deformities, disfigurements, internal injuries, harm to an unborn baby, broken teeth and other serious body injuries among others. Physical abuse itself has both physical and psychological dimensions, a factor which I was on the lookout for in terms of how participants on social media talked about it. On *Scandal* we saw that Obakeng's brand of violence did not just assume a single form but was complex. I was thus interested in seeing the extent to which audiences, talking on social media, identified these complexities.

Specific intervening psychological variables are believed to also be important in the study of domestic violence. Tifft (1993) points to research designed to discover correlates of men who batter women. These men have difficulty in forming close relationships, commonly express negative emotion through anger and possess diminished self-esteem (Pagelow 1984:81). They hold patriarchal, sex stereotyped values, subscribe to rigid sex role definitions and believe that society sanctions controlling women and keeping them in a position subordinate to men (Watts and Courtois 1981:246). They believe in violence against wives who they perceive as violating the ideals of family patriarch. They consistently express jealousy and do not recognise the real effects of their violence and have often been exposed to violence as children, are often exhibiting stress symptoms from work, family and financial pressures. They have difficulty in maintaining intimate relationships because they fear intimacy and have a high need for control and power. However, it is not conclusive if these attributes resulted in battering (Tifft1993:11). Correlation does not prove causation. Many of these attributes were also present in men and women in "highly distressed or discordant relationships" regardless of whether battering is present or not. That is, the research does not tell us much about *why* violence by men is directed toward a selected specific target, for instance, women/intimate partners within a specific selected context, which in this case is the household (Schechter 1982: 210-211).

Some scholars point out that domestic violence is part of the structural violence within the context of hierarchical power arrangements that deny women the tools for self-development. Relatively high rates of battering are associated with decision making

and economic arrangements that foster hierarchical nonparticipation, severely restrict access to collective resource and de-emphasise collective accomplishment and responsibility (Tifft 1993:13). Physical violence is thus associated with power relations. Tifft postulates that when men physically batter their partners, this behaviour serves as an enforcer of men's exercise of institutional and personal power. This is in spite of the fact that South Africa's legislative environment is considered progressive (Sibanda-Moyo et al 2017:6). It is for this reason that Sibanda-Moyo et al sought to explain the prevalence of VAW in South Africa, understanding the phenomenon of VAW in South Africa, the reasons for its persistence and strategies to make successful impacts Sibanda-Moyo et al 2017:7).

Complicating how VAW is talked about on online spaces is the emergence of the so-called "manosphere". [10] "Manosphere" is a "collection of websites, Facebook pages and chat rooms where men vent their rage and spew anti-women rhetoric" according to Pry and Valiente (2013). Yet women contend they encounter violence against them by men *everywhere*,[11] not just in the manosphere. Wiseman (2014) expands on these claims:

> Every woman I know has been shouted at by a stranger, has been called a whore, bitch or slut, whispered to, hissed at, threatened, pressed against, rubbed. Some women I know have been physically attacked, some haven't… Every woman I know has been warned about walking back in the dark, even though they know that most acts of violence happen at home, by somebody they know; every woman I know has carried their keys spiked through their knuckles when they walk down the road at night. Every woman I know texts their friends to say they're home safe.

Wiseman further postulates that attacks on women by men continue in cyberspaces such as on emails and social media. What is of concern is the response of some men to all this violence against women. Certain men's rights movements believe "feminism is the enemy" and direct online bashing to women. Wiseman gives an example of a

[10] Pry, A & Valiente A. (2013-10-16). "Women Battle Online Anti-Women Hate From the 'Manosphere".
https://abcn.ws/2Boev9D / Accessed 12 December 2018.
[11] Wiseman, E. (2014-06-01). "The everyday fear of violence every woman has to cope with".
https://bit.ly/2UTDkDs / Accessed 12 December 2018

"manosphere", an online site known as Reddit's Red Pill, with almost 53,000 subscribers, believing women were designed solely for sex. Wiseman contends these men are from mixed backgrounds, some of them male victims of abuse and father's rights proponents. These men are daring because they are protected by the anonymity offered by online spaces (Pry and Valiente 2013). Men are doing this for attention because they feel the courts are biased against them and are not getting a fair deal. Pry and Valiente, observe, citing a manosphere blogger Paul Emam. They do this to influence policy (Iqbal 2018).[12] Emam denies his blog is anti-women but that he is simply documenting how men feel. Iqbal who has been exploring online antifeminism since 2015 points out that these men feel justified (Iqbal 2018). Iqbal further contends that there is no way of telling if these misogynists are all men due to the anonymity of online space.

Further complicating how VAW is talked about on online spaces is the fact that domestic violence or intimate partner violence has been identified as the most *pervasive* form of gender-based violence (Watts and Zimmerman 2002; State of World Population 2005). Often victims of intimate partner violence such as Gloria do not leave their abusive relationships because of a range of reasons. For instance, they might not want to "hurt" their partner; fear of being alone; fear of retaliation and/or fear of not finding anyone better; believing that she can bring about change in her partner; believing she/he can make the relationship better by changing her behaviour; because she does not want to be (seen to be) a quitter; she needs to protect the children or parents; and/or religious convictions, and so on (Barnett and LaViolette 2000; Websdale 1999). Furthermore, domestic violence is considered difficult to deal with because it happens in the privacy of homes. The public/private dichotomy masks many forms of gender-based violence, particularly such acts as rape, incest, sexual assault, and domestic violence (Wies and Haldane 2011:3). Pillay (2010:66) observes, also, that medical personnel do not investigate and report cases of violence against women unless the woman asks for help and report the perpetrator. There is fear that if women are required to report cases of violence against them it will deter many women from seeking medical attention (Pillay 2010:66). Furthermore, cultural barriers exist that

[12] Iqbal, N. (2018-11-11). "Social media has elevated misogyny to new levels of violence". https://bit.ly/2DfX2Td / Accessed November 2018.

prevent women from reporting and talking about violence against them (Sibanda-Moyo et al 2017:47). I am of the view that exposing the hidden sites of violence allows us to reflect on the structural factors that produce, reproduce, and exacerbate the suffering of the victim, and far too often, protect the perpetrator. This study focuses on how people *talk* about this form of pervasive but hard to report violence in order to shed light on the relationship between the reality of gender violence and the discourse of gender violence.

2..2.2 Causes of violence against women

Fighting gender-based violence has proved vexatious because women are not subjected to violence for the same reasons or in the same ways (Zuckerhut 2011). On the surface, it might appear that a perpetrator such as Obakeng initiates abuse *spontaneously*. For instance, he may feel that the victim did not behave appropriately or did not fulfil her duties, thus had to be punished (Zuckerhut 2011). However, the likes of Gqola, Lowstedt (2015) and Sibanda-Moyo et al (2017) caution that looking at surface causes or failing to consider the interplay of history and structural factors can lead us to depend on superficial explanations. Sibanda-Moyo et al (2017:5), for instance, blame high incidences of violence against women in South Africa to socio economic factors that include women's limited education, capital, labour opportunities and resource control, the culture of violence in South Africa that was inherited from the violent pasts of apartheid, colonialism and empire, and the culture of silence).

Violence against women, although largely blamed on patriarchy, is also believed to stem from other disparate sources as well (Lowstedt 2015). Some theories, for instance, suggest mental illness, abuse of alcohol, drug and other substance abuse; socio-economic deprivation and social isolation, poverty, educational and age gaps and cultural practices (Kurst Swanger and Petcosky 2003: 34-35). In some cases, family violence is fostered and maintained due to a society's general acceptance of violence as a normative and legitimate means of resolving conflict (Tifft 1993:1). Gqola (2015:45), in her study of the example of rape cautions against taking the view that rape is merely a manifestation of contemporary post-apartheid "culture". Rape, rather, has a specific and traceable genealogy. For instance, rape can be traced back to the "architecture of slave-ordered Cape Colony" (Gqola 2015:40). Essentially, the history of rape, "is the history of slavery, colonialism and race science" (p.40). Indeed, South

Africa itself was founded on the “trauma of slavery and sexual subjection” (pp.42-43). Historically, the violation of black bodies was the norm. Such norms are apparently still with us today.

Ayiera (2010:13) argues that violence against women is a “prominent expression of pattern of domination”. As noted, some scholars blame “patriarchy” for the incidence of violence in the home. They argue that the family hierarchy of power subordinates women and children, since they are considered to have less power *naturally*. Such subordination of women is apparently legitimised through the hierarchal structure of the family unit, as well as the institutions and social structure of society as a whole (Sigler, 1989), such that women are considered “appropriate victims” (State of World Population 2005; Dobash and Dobash, 1977). Hence:

> Patriarchy as a social-political order is based on male hegemony through dominance and denigration of other experiences. It concentrates power at public and private spheres within the male. “Normal” is defined from the perspective of the heterosexual male and other perspectives are peripheral...Violence is an acceptable and integral part of maintaining this order, insofar as it does not fundamentally threaten the structures (Ayiera 2010:12-13).

It has been argued that, in South Africa and elsewhere, the patriarchal system is embedded in society regardless of race or class (Pillay 2010:66.) Dealing with it requires attacking it at its roots. This means, for instance, creating spaces for equal gender representation and integrating interventions that transform the lives of women socially, educationally and economically. One view is that although not all physical or sexual violence are a result of this patriarchal power, it is a major contributor (Holter 1984). Traditional or conservative gender attitudes are regarded by some as stemming from the belief that men and women’s roles are clearly demarcated. For example, girls must be “submissive” or “docile” while boys should be “aggressive” and “dominating” (York 2011:15). Willis (1992) observes that people who uphold these conservative attitudes are likely to blame female victims of violence. Perpetrators may, in such cases, get communal support or sympathy in their actions.

The role of education, for instance, is widely regarded as critical to efforts to emancipate women and prevent abuse. Such education can happen through media platforms. Communication strategists insist that the media plays a key role in shaping perceptions. Sibanda-Moyo et al (2017:68) state that:

> Messages conveyed through the media often determine whether or not survivors speak out about their abuse, and the nature of support and assistance women receive from the public and the criminal justice system. Therefore, while the media may be influential in promoting negative ideas about VAW, it also has the power to be part of the solution.

Since violence is apparently a learned behaviour (Rushton 1982), media can play a role in helping to change it. South African television has traditionally relied on edutainment models to create awareness (cf. Burton 2012). Dramas and soap operas have functioned as behavioural change agents (Spence 2001:188). What is not yet fully known or appreciated, however, is the role of social media. The inquiry about the role of social media is the basis of this study.

In making a case for more research on gender-based-violence in South Africa, Isaacs (2014) argues that representation of partner violence is not done in a comprehensive manner despite that South Africa has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world. What role does social media play in this scourge? (This forms the discussion in the section below) The inquiry into the role of online platforms in behaviour change has some important antecedents in South Africa, particularly in relation to health communication. For instance, *Soul City*, one of South Africa's longest running primetime drama series, put a lot of store in feedback and the interaction of television audience. Kin (2012:14) notes that the producers were most interested in conversations the community were having regarding the drama. Viewers took to social media as a form of engagement and dialogue around each episode. *Soul City* saw social media as an opportunity to engage with its viewers on issues they broadcasted. The main goal was to create awareness of topical issues. The issues resonated with the e-public because they were “real life issues”. The *Soul City* social media page became a platform for giving voice to the people to air their thoughts, ideas and opinions (Kin 2012:15). Kin observes this also strengthened the *Soul City* brand, in addition to social media becoming an extension of other media products such as print,

radio and television. This interoperability is similar to what we see on the *Scandal*'s Facebook page.

2.3 New media

Social media is a form of new media that has antecedents in the traditional media. For instance, Bell (2010: 11) has called it a "high octane word of mouth". Below I give a brief historical background of the interminable shift from traditional to new media, since, in order to understand where we are going, we need to understand where we are coming from (Kemp 2016). Such a background is important, also in order to *situate* and *contextualise* the study of social media talk about gender violence.

Before the written word information was disseminated by word-of-mouth only (Wyrwoll 2014: 24). Wyrwoll notes that publication began after the monopoly of letters, mostly held by a priestly caste, had been broken. Scripts of various kinds came to use, but book production was confined largely to religious centres of learning. The invention of printing transformed the possibilities of the written word (Wyrwoll 2014:24). Printing had been first invented in China in the 6th century A.D., but it was not passed on to Europe. In Europe, the invention of printing is normatively attributed to Gutenberg, from about 1440-1450. It became the first publishing technology to reach mass audiences (Wyrwoll ibid). People wanting to publish their own opinions would sometimes print pamphlets (Blossom 2009: 16). The most famous pamphlet, printed anonymously at the time, in the mid-18th century, was by an English migrant, Thomas Paine. It was titled the *Commonsense.* The pamphlets were followed by the production of newspapers.

Chun (2006:8) explains that the term "media" as opposed to medium or mediums is linked to the term mass media. Media became the term to describe inexpensive newspapers and magazines. Motion pictures (cinema) and radio came along at the beginning of the 20th century, followed by television in the middle of the 20th century (Bloom 2009: 18). The first motion picture credited as being a film shows people getting in and out of the train and was first shown publicly to people in France in 1895

(Patrick 2016[13]). Television was invented in the 1930's. Between the 1980's and 1990's saw the emergence of the world-wide web and Internet (Wyrwoll 2014:16). Basically, old media involved a human creator who manually assembled textual, visual and/or audio elements into a particular composition or a sequence (Manovich 2001:56). On the other hand, new media is, in contrast, characterised by variability. Instead of identical copies a new media object typically gives rise to many different versions. And rather than being created completely by a human author, these versions are often in part automatically assembled by a computer. But the main motivation for designing the computer network infrastructure in the 1960's was for better storing of information. Digital data are light, mobile and can theoretically exist forever (Segev 2010: 5).

Wyrwoll notes that although the Internet and the world-wide web is used interchangeably, the two are not synonymous. The Internet connects computers together and the information that travels from one computer to the other does so via various technological languages. Segev (2010:5) describes Internet as the "lightest media tool" that "spreads and diffuses with the speed of light" and the ability to store information limitlessly. It is what makes it a potentially powerful tool of communication but one that can be used to control too. It can be manipulated by those with power to assert their ideologies and thus pose a danger to produce information and knowledge inequalities (Segev 2010: 1). It is also what draws more people to use it more than any other media. Inis (1951) in a letter to Marshall McLuhan, reminds us that the more a medium of communication is used the stronger its influence. Inis was more concerned with the influence on creation of monopoly of knowledge because those with access to the knowledge have power. This point has significance for this study. Feminism and its binary opposite, patriarchy, are two competing ideologies. Feminism is viewed as a subordinate ideology to patriarchy, which is largely blamed for the seeming permanence of women's oppression.

The World Wide Web, the brain child of Tim Berners-Lee, who wanted easy access to information from anywhere in the world (Brown 2009: 9), enables the retrieval of

[13] Patrick, N, (08-08-2016). "In 1895 "The Arrival of the Train" was one of the first films shown to the public – it nearly caused panic".
https://bit.ly/2Rw8dQ1/ Accessed on October 27 2017

information using specific software or browsers such as Internet Explorer or Google Chrome (Segev 2010: 29). The Web 1.0 period had the same characteristics with the traditional media in the sense that the flow of information remained largely one-way (West and Tumer 2010: 376). Websites put out information but did not have platforms that allowed audiences to *interact*. For example, Africa's first newspaper to go online, the *Mail & Guardian*, was only pushing content to audience without *interaction*. In some accounts, Web 1.0 first appeared in the 1970's, the period when Internet was born as a project called the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET). During this time UseNet, a collection of discussion groups was born, hence the name User Generated Content. User-Generated Content is "the sum of all ways in which people make use of Social Media" (Wyroll 2011: 18).

Facebook arrived in 2004 and for some this was the start of the Web 2.0, an era of pervasive connectedness and "total information awareness" (Lee 2012), supposedly the era in which we are now. The term Web 2.0 is attributed to Dale Dougherty of the US publishing company, O' Reilly media, which hosted a Web 2.0 conference in 2004 (Brown 2009: 1; Fuchs 2017: 34). Although some scholars do not acknowledge the Web 1.0 era as separate from the Web 2.0 (cf. Romero 2014; Brown 2009), Dougherty attempts to show the distinct differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0:

> Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation" and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences (O'reilly 2005).

This marked a *concomitant shift* of communication that was purely text based to multi-media communication, giving rise to new forms of mediated interaction. Brown defines Web 2.0 as "sites and spaces" found on the Internet where users can share words, pictures, sounds and video. This era is also known as the digital age or the Third Industrial revolution (Romero 2014:20). It simply implies the change from analogue mechanical and electronic technology to digital technology. Recently, this phase is being gradually supplanted by the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) which

Davis (2016) describes as the advent of “cyber-physical systems” involving “entirely new capabilities for people and machines”. [14] For Davis, 4IR represents “entirely new ways in which technology becomes embedded within societies and even our human bodies”. He cites, for instance, genome editing, new forms of machine intelligence, breakthrough materials and approaches to governance that rely on cryptographic methods such as the blockchain as examples.

In some accounts, Web 2.0 constitutes the era when User Generated Content became very apparent. Baym (2011:16) has this to say about the ubiquity of User Generated Content in Web 2.0:

> They include Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, to which they (people) can upload many diverse media (photos, videos, music, links, and more) and connect their profiles with others through "friending”. The mobility of some new media means that we can now have conversations that would have once been held in our homes when we are in public and that we can be with others wherever we are, feeding into a related set of concerns about privacy and companionship.

Other media platforms powered by Internet were also developed such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. These are a basket of tools at our disposal to create our “”own content, to publish it, and share. This Web 2.0 era is different from the traditional media and Web 1.0 because apparently it offers a two-way flow of information (Fuchs 2017: 46). Others are already starting to talk about Web 3.0 as having already arrived (Fuchs 2017), on the back of 4IR. It is argued that if the web (www) is defined as a techno-social system that comprises the social process of cognition, communication and co-operation, then the whole web is *social* (Fuchs 2017:46). Based on this theory, Web 1.0 is a computer-based human cognition, web 2.0 a computer-based networked system of human communication, web 3.0 a computer-based networked system of human cooperation. The *sociality* of Web 3.0 is central to this study, particularly because it gives us social television and generally because it is responsible for social media talk and for high octane word of mouth.

[14] Davis, N. (2016-01-19). “What is the fourth industrial revolution?” https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/what-is-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/ Accessed 10 March 2018.

The arrival of internet and the development of User Generated Content saw new technology theories emerging. The first such attempt to develop theories to explain new technologies can be traced back to the revolutionary works of Robert Innis and Marshall McLuhan of the 1950s (Manovich 2001: 65). The nineteenth and the early twentieth century witnessed the development of numerous mechanical and electrical tabulators and calculators. They were gradually getting faster and their use became more wide spread. In parallel, modern media allowed the storage of images, image sequences, sounds and text in different material forms: a photographic plate, film stock, a gramophone record (Manovich 2001:46). According to Manovich new theories were required because:

> New media is interactive, in contrast to traditional media where the order of presentation was fixed. The user can now interact with a media object. In the process of interaction, the user can choose which elements to display or which paths to follow, thus generating a unique work. Thus, the user becomes the co-author of the work (Manovich 2001:66).

In the 1970's most organisations were having audio and video conferencing and networked computerised systems being installed (Baym 2011:31). Organisations wanted to know when they could hold telephone conferences or have face-to-face meetings with staff. Research was driven by managerial concerns about when to choose each medium. For instance, theories about how women would be affected by new media also were developed. These included cyberfeminist theory. It was envisaged gender would cease to be meaningful and might be entirely reinvented (Baym 2011: 38). This study fits into this mode of theory building, where traditional modes of mediation meet new modes of mediation. We try to find out how new media is enabling new kinds of talk about gender violence, and vice versa.

Despite the name "new media", there are some who argue that it never really replaces the old media (Brown 2009:08). Rather, the old and the new co-exist while new media continues to evolve (Brown 2009: 08). Brown notes that, for example, we still have iterations of old media such as the newspaper, radio and movies. In Africa, radio is still – as unbelievable as it may sound – the accessible medium of choice for most

people [15](UNESCO 2017). In a survey of 11 African countries, UNESCO, discovered that radio reached the "broadest audience in Africa." The biggest difference between traditional media and new media, however, is speed. New media allows information to be shared and content modified instantly (Kelleher 2013). The only old media that died was the telegram, killed by Internet. When Internet came into use, traditional media evolved, adapted and embraced Internet to reach more users and become interactive (Segev 2010:113).

Scholars argue that the internet is no longer just an information portal. Rather, it is the very 'electricity' of modern society and commerce, connecting us to the people and things we care about most according (Kemp 2016). The 2016 *Digital Yearbook* which issues key digital statistics and data points for 232 countries in the world shows that whereas the world has slightly over 7 billion people, Facebook dominates the global social platform rankings with more than one billion people on Facebook every day and two billion each month (Kemp 2016; Mazibuko 2017). Mazibuko (2017) notes that people check their Facebook at least 14 times a day. In South Africa, 16 million people access Facebook every month. This sociality is what drives this study. If so many people are on Facebook, researchers should probably take their studies there. At least, knowledge that is produced on Facebook needs to be taken seriously and studied rigorously. It may, or it may not, change how we see topical issues such as gender violence.

It has been noted that the *quality of attention* on mobile phones tends to be higher, and people tended to consume content faster on mobile, compared to traditional media. For example, people consume content at a rate of 2.5 seconds on television compared with 1.7 seconds on mobile phone (Mazibuko 2017). This was followed by laptop computers, tablets and feature phones. Delloite's mobile consumer survey of 2015/2016 states that "smartphones are not just a part of our lives, they are our lives". Most people in the world access Facebook using smart phones, with 62 percent reportedly checking their phones 30 times a day (Mazibuko 2017). In Africa consumers check their smartphones over several billion times a day, with over one third checking

[15]UNESCO (2017-02-13)
http://www.africanews.com/2017/02/13/radio-is-africa-s-most-influential-information-outlet-unesco-survey//

their phones every five minutes. Although the people accessing internet in Africa is still low (29 percent) and only 11 percent active social media users, the number of active Internet users and active social media users had grown by 14 percent and 25 percent in 2016 according to (Kemp 2016). The pace of content creation is surpassing our ability to consume, making attention our scarcest resource (Mazibuko 2017). Mazibuko further alerts us to the fact that since the beginning of time up to about 2003 humanity created 5 billion gigabytes of information but today, we create 5 billion gigabytes of information every 10 minutes. All these points suggest that there is something worth studying in social media talk. At the very least, we know that everyday discourse is slowly but surely migrating to social media.

Consumers, also, are increasingly choosing smarter devices as they provide them with the functions of multiple devices in one, as well as access to an increasing range of services from virtually any location at any time (*Deloitte's Consumer Survey* 2015/2016: 5). The same survey notes that new media is these days synonymous with social media because that is where most of our communication is now taking place. I now examine Social media in relation to Facebook, which is part of the focus of attention in this study.

2.3.1 Social media

Web 2.0, as we saw, birthed Social Networking sites, also collectively known as social media. But what is social media? Murphy, Hill and Dean (2014:5) contend there is no agreed definition of the term. They describe social media as "the set of web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers" (Murphy et al 2014:5). Shirky (2008: 20-21) relates social media to social software tools that "increase our ability to share, to co-operate, with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organisations". Boyd (2014: 16) refers the term to "sites and services that emerged during the early 2000's, including social networking sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their own content". Blossom (2009:38) reminds us that social media does not eliminate human nature; it only gives it new ways to express human nature that may have an impact on how we can survive

and thrive. In a sense, social media enables ideas to compete with one another more effectively in venues that offer more open expression to more people than ever before.

The frequently asked question, however, is not so much “what is social media?” as “what is *social* about social media?” (Fuchs 2017: 50). Most literature about social media rarely address this question. If they do address it, this is done only in the most superficial of ways. For instance, there seems to be an assumption that there is a common and standard understanding about what the term entails or means. But, a closer look at the uses of the term reveals that there is actually a complex variety of assumptions at work (Wyrwoll 2014). Interestingly, as old a sage as Karl Marx had, long before the Internet had been invented, predicted in the *Grundrisse* that he envisaged a global information network in which everyone attempts to inform himself about others and connections are introduced (Marx 1857/1858: 161). At the heart of modernity was to be a kind of sociality driven by information and networks. A number of models of social activity have followed these early theorisations of the global information society.

One salient model of human social activity that has been proposed sees knowledge as central to an information society. Knowledge, seen this way, is a threefold process of cognition, communication and cooperation (Fuchs 2017:44). Durkheim, Weber, Tönnies (and Karl Marx before them) have attempted in different ways to unpack this three-fold process. Durkheim’s concept of *the social* regards all media and all software as being social in the sense that they are products of social processes (Fuchs 2017: 41). Durkheim assets they are social because of the existence of humans in society. Social relations shape human knowledge. Humans can only exist by entering into social relations with other humans – through communication (Fuchs (2017:44). Fuchs posits that cognition is a “necessary prerequisite for communication and the precondition for the emergence of cooperation” such that for one to cooperate, one needs to communicate and in-order to communicate one needs to cognise. Cognition is thus the knowledge process of an individual Fuchs (ibid). Weber’s understanding of sociality is “action” but in a “meaningful symbolic interaction between human actors” (Weber 1978:22-23). Weber is of the opinion that social relations influences knowledge. It is thus social when people chat on Facebook or send emails to one another (Fuchs 2017: 6). Tönnies, on the other hand, conceives community to be

social because there is a sense of belonging and mutual dependence. Communication turns this form (belonging and mutual dependence) of the social into community (Fuchs 2017:6). For example, Facebook is part of community of real or supposed friends and real or supposed "sharing".

For his part, Marx's sense of the social is tied with cooperation and, some would say, *social*ism. Basically, Marx postulates that cooperation is the essence of society (Marx and Engels 1846: 50). He understands *the social* as the cooperation of several individuals such as collaborative work of writing. Fuchs (2017: 7) asserts that the various forms of social as propounded by the three scholars apply to Facebook although the collaborative one by Marx applies only to a lesser degree. Hence:

> This means, for example, that on Facebook an individual creates a multimedia content like a video on the cognitive level), publishes it so that others can comment (the communicative level) and allows others to manipulate and remix the content, so that new content with multiple authorship can emerge. One step does not necessarily result in the next, but the technology has the potential to enable the combination of all three activities in one space. Facebook, by default encourages the transition from one stage of sociality to the next, within the same social space (Fuchs 2017: 50).

In essence, *social* media such as Facebook foster interaction, often leading to collaboration, participation and sharing. Social media are presumed to be high octane online facilitators or enhancers of human networks (Titango 2013: 5).

The word "social" suggests connectedness and media implies platforms. Indeed, Facebook and other platforms such as Twitter and You Tube are alternatively known as *social networking sites*. On these sites, users "share" knowledge, pose and solve problems, seek and offer advice, tell stories and debate issues of interest. They allow users to create profile pages with personal information, establish friends or contacts and communicate via private messages and public comments (Murphy et al 2014:5). Users can post photos, video, notes and status updates that can be shared among friends. They can make new contacts, follow and "like" different groups, organisations and products. The ubiquitous "Facebook status" tool poses the question to users: "What is on your mind". On the one hand, statuses are the way that news spreads

quickly through Facebook. Because your posts go into your friends' Live Feeds, a single update can have a big impact and is somewhat likely to be repeated in some way or another (Abraham and Pearlman 2010: 88-89). On the other hand, the question "what's on your mind?" is tapping the deepest recesses and most private spaces of a person's consciousness. This assumption has been important in formulating the rationale for this study. I assumed that, prompted by the Gloria/Obakeng episodes, users would have *a way of talking* about what is on their minds about gender violence. Hence the title of this study: Social Media Talk.

Some researchers have made interesting observations regarding the concept of "friends" to describe the people who connect with each other on Facebook. Baym (2012) did research to highlight the blurred boundaries between friends and fans. She notes that people called 'friends' online may be anything from "strangers to acquaintances, to lovers to family to best friends and more" Baym (2012: 290). The word 'friends' gives a standardised definition which is: "a social, mutually agreed upon connection between two individuals" (Baym 2012: 312). Before Facebook such a standard definition of friends would not be possible; it would require explicit definitions. In this study, the definition of friends covers fans for the simple reason that Facebook has a limit of 500 friends. To accommodate more than 500 friends, Facebook created fan pages. The author will discuss fandom later in this Chapter. Measuring social contacts in the real world would be a "tedious task" or "impossible" (Baym 2012:300). During the pre-social media era, announcing a message to all your friends as we see in the Facebook posts was not possible. Baym (2012: 290) contends the experiences such as that offered by Facebook cannot occur anywhere else. Everything that happens on Facebook is exclusive to that digital environment and these experiences are relevant to real life.

This is more so if it is a Facebook page where there are most likely to be more friends compared to an individual account. For example, Coca-Cola's Facebook page had around 100 million likes in 2016 (Fuchs 2017: 19). One has to make a request if they want to be a friend of someone and if that request is accepted then the two are connected as "friends". If it's a Facebook page, one has to simply "like" the page to become a friend and view posts and make comments on the page. But there is also an option to unlike comments posted by friends. Fuchs (2017: 190) views liking as an

ideology. His explanation is that the like button is a way of Facebook to allow users to express empathy. The button “Like” also includes “love”, “haha”, “wow”, “sad” and “angry”.

Fuchs (2017) has argued that there is bias towards positive emotions in the design of these buttons as four of the six buttons express positive emotions and only two negative ones (“sad” “angry”). In addition, they are organised in the form of one button called “Like”.

> If one quickly clicks on this button, then the “Like” option is activated. Only if one puts the cursor on the “Like” button without clicking do all six buttons pop up and one can click on one of them. In this pop-up button dialogue, the “Like” symbol is closed to the cursor and the “Angry” symbol far away. This design makes “Likes” more likely than the expression of anger. Advertisers, brands and companies running campaigns on Facebook pages can therefore feel more assured that users are more likely to like than to dislike their products and postings (Fuchs 2017:191).

Fuchs further adds that the design and structure of brand pages on Facebook discourages negative reactions. What we seem to know at this stage is that social networking cites have turned informal forms of sociality, especially chats, into a “formalised record with an audit trail” (Murphy et al, 2014: 24). Such trails they claim, will change the norms of social behaviour and lead users to assume a whole new digitally exclusive behaviour which is new and unique. This is because each communication platform brings its own behaviours. The values and behaviours of Facebook users are unique to them. These new behaviours are in the form of social sharing.

2.3.2 Facebook and Talk

Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin and Chris Hughes who were Harvard students (Fuchs 2017: 185). As illustrated above, the power of Facebook is seen through the sheer numbers of people that use the platform on a daily or monthly basis worldwide. But there is also immense financial power behind Facebook. For instance, annual profits increased from USD 138 million in 2007 to USD 3, 69 billion in 2015. Facebook also swallows up any and all start-ups that may

disrupt or challenge its social media hegemony. For instance, it has since acquired other social media platforms such as WhatsApp (a mobile phone instant messaging app provider) and Instagram (the photo-sharing platform). There is seemingly nowhere to run from Facebook.

This study focuses on the Facebook platform due to its ubiquity, and due to the presence of a *Scandal* Facebook page where "public" conversations and different forms of talk took place. A central proposition of my study is that Facebook could not have any use if it was not for "talk". Facebook was created so that people could "connect" with people they knew (Abram and Pearlman 2010: 27). Social media allow private conversations to enter the public domain (Baym, 2011: 16). Morley (2010: 3) describes this act as "the radical intrusion" of "the realm of the far" into the "realm of the near", precisely what this study is seeking to investigate. How much has the realm of the far, as represented by disparate television audiences, brought together into the realm of the nearby social media, to teach us about topical discourse such as of gender violence? Baym (2000: 218) believes that "it is by listening to what online communities *talk about* that we are able to understand their diversity and the opportunities and challenges they offer". This study "listened" to how "realms of the far" talk about a given social change topic.

Stenovec (2015) calls Facebook a "nation" because of its wide use by disparate users who connect on a single platform. Nations, at any rate, are "invented" (Anderson 2006: 42-43) who refers the nation to citizens who maintain "deep attachments" to each other in the absence of face-to-face contact:

> The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in their minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 2006: 6).

Lee (2011: xiii) contends that scientists have shown that Facebook is "connecting" the world with 92 percent of all pairs of users connected "within four degrees" of separation (friends of friends of friends of friends) which means information whether true or not

spreads quickly. It makes people engage more, keeps the site alive.[16] This makes Facebook just about the largest extant repository of human data.

Furthermore, Facebook is acknowledged to be the place where most users spend more time on than any other website (Murphy et al 2014:9). The corporation has, among other ills, been accused of meddling in elections and compromising democracy, and has involved itself in organ donation drives and other trendy global campaigns. There are even plans, by 2020, for Facebook to unveil its own currency! By themselves, these statistics and factoids make the Facebook platform a site worthy of serious and rigorous investigation. Like me, researchers have been wanting to understand and to analyse data from Facebook in order to comprehend *what issues are important, what people think about them*, as well as monitoring emerging threats and trends (Murphy et al 2014:9). This objective goes to the heart of my study, precisely. I assume that a new tool for "talk" or conversation (Facebook, social media) has opened avenues for researchers of topical social change issues to gather data about "what issues are important, what people think about them".

The combination of social media and social change is one that this study has examined and found to be salient. Its nature and dynamics, it is argued, could spell important new knowledges about "forms of talk" in the 21st century and what we learn from such "talk". Murphy et al (2014:4) emphasise that:

> Whereas shared experience once meant holding a debate-watch party or discussing a newspaper article at the water cooler, it now connotes an entirely new set of behaviours. No longer limited to face-to-face communication, letters, phone calls, or even e-mail exchanges, more people now *take part* in real-time dialogue during a political debate, for instance, through status updates and comments; liking political figures, ideologies, or a friend's status update about the latest gaffe; *sharing* voting behaviour via photos; or sharing the action of political donations with their Facebook friends.

[16] Boyd, D. & Heer, J. (2006). Profiles as conversation: Networked identity performance on friendster. http://vis.stanford.edu/files/2006-Friendster-HICSS.pdf Accessed 20 December 2018.

It is the nature and dynamics of this "participation" that this study was most interested in. How do people "share" when "talking" on social media about social change topics such as intimate partner violence? At some level, it appears that Facebook allows researchers to peek into the minds of users. An important window with which to gain insights into public sentiment or national trends about a particular issue (Lee 2011: 200) is opened. What we just do not know is what sort of window this is and how far it opens. Is it a Pandora's Box? Also, we need to understand the usability and authenticity of social media "talk", and how much we can trust it.

As much as Facebook has become a normative platform to discuss social issues and a platform where people can voice their opinions and their beliefs (Lee 2011:202), concern has arisen with the nature of the "talk" on social media due to the proliferation of "disinformation" campaigns and so-called fake news (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018).[17] Despite the proliferation of fact-checking platforms, the jury is still not out on what exactly is unique or "fake" about fake news since news itself is a construct and since disinformation and propaganda have been around since time immemorial. What seems to be critical about fake news, however, is the availability of social media which helps it spread virally like wild fire. Facebook, after all, is ranked as one of the "hottest" traffic ranking social networking site globally (Zhao et al, 2011: 1). Currently, 2 billion users are on the platform. Its founder, Mark Zuckerberg (in Lee, 2011: 7) has stated that Facebook's mission is ''to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected''. This aspect has also been identified in this study as an important factor of social media talk. The amount of participation and "sharing" is always already heightened, greater and more intense.

In 2012 Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg introduced the "organ initiative" instrumentalised by the Facebook Organ Donor Tool (Lee 2012:200). This initiative was touted as a new Facebook feature that had "the potential to save lives" (Palis 2012[18]). The social network announced that the tool "will allow people to share their status as an organ donor on their timelines". Zuckerberg explained that the project

[17] Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeroupoulos, A., Levy DAL & Nielsen, RK (2018). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2018.
http://www.medialiitto.fi/files/4493/Reuters_Institute_Digital_News_Report_2018.pdf
[18] Palis, C. (1 May 2012). "Zuckerberg Talks Social Network's Initiative To Save Lives", *Huffington Post*, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/01/facebook-organ-donor-tool_n_1467194.html

was “inspired by Facebook members who have used the site to solve problems creatively”. It is easy to see how a tool such as the Organ Donor Tool is possible: because it leverages the potential for Facebook to spread awareness and inspire action. “People are using the same social tools that they’re using just to keep in touch with people on a day-to-day basis to solve these important social issues,” said Zuckerberg. “So, we figured, okay, well, could we do anything that would help people solve other types of issues, like all of the people who need organ donations in the world? And we came up with this pretty simple thing which we’re hopeful can help out just in the same way that people have done all these other things” (Palis 2012). This potential for social media to connect people and to inspire action is understood, as was first illustrated by the so-called Arab Spring. Studies by the likes of Matsilele (2018) have shown that political dissidence can be initiated via social media.

The potential of social media to inspire *personal forms of action* – such as organ donation – is, however, is a completely new field of study altogether. The area of personal forms of action, such as behaviour change, is of particular interest in my study – hence the incorporation of the gender violence angle. Can social media “talk” inspire behaviour change? The Facebook Organ Donor initiative inspired many social issue campaigns, discussions and initiatives. Similarly, my study is motivated to get a deeper understanding, not only of the varieties and forms of talk, but how other interlinking subjects such as domestic violence (what was being talked about), audiences/friends/fans (who was talking about it), social television and soap opera (the channels that provided the basis for the talk) and Facebook itself as a platform for conversations coalesce as aspects for behaviour change.

The area of online interaction is gaining traction in the social sciences because of the potentially new and rich varieties of data it can generate for researchers of complex social phenomena. Nancy Baym is one of the first internet scholars to take online interaction seriously (Hine 2008:922). She did an ethnographic study of an online soap opera discussion group. Baym found that the online space was a place for “information and updates”, “keep in touch with friends and have fun during a stressful working day” (Baym 2000:29). Baym’s study helped reveal what was important to the audience of the soap opera in question. She also discovered, like this study, that online spaces can be a place for humour (Baym 2000:30). Sumiala, Tikka, Huhtamaki and

Valaskivi (2016) used digital ethnography for a more nuanced and in-depth interpretation of Twitter messages on the life of the Charlie Hebdo saga. This was used in combination with other research methods namely automated content analysis and social network analysis. Being a relatively new area of study, relatively little is known about the nature of Facebook 'talk", more so one that is directly linked to Social television.

Zhao, Lin and Lio (2011: 5) observed that the advent of new media require that there be more and further studies on the impact of human behaviour on social networks and vice versa, to analyse how users talk to each other and learn from each other. Baym (2010:12) elaborates that:

> When using talk, a horizontal line divided the top and lower halves of the screen, each half showing messages from one interactant. It was as minimalist and purely textual as a communication medium could be. Talk remained in regular usage into the early 1990s.

The important question here seems to be: Is this kind of "talk" that we see on Facebook still the same as the one referred to by Baym? Social networking sites have been in existence since the mid-1990s, hence online talk did *not* start with Facebook (Baym, 2011: 12). Goffman, who wrote about "talk" in the 1960's, could perhaps not have imagined this kind of online interaction referred to here by Baym. Goffman acknowledges that conversation is an "awe-inspiring area of investigation because it is so vast and elusive" (Tannen, 2005:11). It is through "talk" that people are able to make sense of the world (Madill, Widdicombe, and Barkham 2005). Nylund (2007:2), referring to "talk" on radio, recounted that "talk" is a "prominent discourse" that played a "powerful role in everyday life, shaping our political values and gender ideologies, and supplying the material out of which people fashion their identities". He further describes "talk" as providing a "safe haven" in which people could "bond" (Nylund, 2007:111). Similarly talking about television "talk", Livingstone and Hunt, 2001: 6) assert that "talk" helps frame social relations and shape identities. They further describe "talk" as "action" and "participation". The two authors further allude to the fact that effects of television depend on discussions such as how parents may share their experiences with their children after viewing a television programme.

As already noted, Facebook's mission is ostensibly ''to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected'' (Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg (in Lee, 2011:7). The extent to which Facebook does this, however, remains a subject of conjecture. In fact, in spite of 2 billion users interacting on the platform, the nature and dynamics of the interaction by users on the Facebook platform is yet to be fully understood. For instance, the controversy surrounding Cambridge Analytica[19] and the 2016 US elections shows how little we all know about how social media interaction works, particularly in terms of influencing personal choices and actions. There has thus tended to be scepticism and doubts about how much we know what social media does and does not do. A number of researchers have however reached early conclusions that suggest that social media is already a positive force. At the very least, it has been seen as a tool that enhances communication and gives greater power to users. For instance, some researchers view Facebook as a communication tool that "fills the void created by the lack of real face-to-face conversations" (Lee, 2011: 15).

Lee (2011) contends Facebook is so "true to life" that encountering a person for the first time generally results in a more accurate personality appraisal than meeting face to face. Some argue Facebook may be an appropriate forum for many because people like to be talked with not talked to (Brown, 2009: 51). Brown further describes Facebook as a "talk back" forum. He contends Facebook has become popular because that is where everyone wants to hang out these days. People go on Facebook, for instance, for fear of missing out (Brown, 2009:18). In this study, I have merged the theoretical insights of those who view Facebook positively as a positive force of communication with those who regard the platform as a "wild west" which we are only beginning to understand.

2.4 Television studies

Television, invented in the first half of the 20th century, continues to be a place where billions worldwide invest time and attention (Cushion, 2012:3.) Television programmes trigger conversations and help set the agenda for people's concerns (Livingstone and Hunt, 2001: 6; Allen 2004:1). The questions surrounding the ontology of television

[19] Chang, A. (2018-05-02). "The Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandal, explained with a simple diagram", https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/28/facebook-biggest-country_n_6565428.html/Accessed 5 July 2018.

remains varied and complex (Evans 2011:17). The way we understood television when it was invented in the 1930's and the advent of social television from 2012 is obviously different. When television was introduced, it was assumed that it brought families together and helped keep marriages alive (Bogart 1956). As television sets became more affordable to many people, however, television viewing became more and more individualised. Prime time is defined as the time when the whole family usually watches television Ang (1985: 56). *Scandal* is viewed on prime time. Prime time is between 17h30 to 22h30 Central African Time. Soap operas are slotted within this prime time as they attract a broad mass audience (Tunstall 2003:116). Broadcasters maximise on them (soap operas) to draw on advertisers, where the bulk of the revenue that sustains them is derived.

Prime time television has often been used by producers of social change campaigns as a vehicle to drive social discourse and behaviour change. Johnson (2001) argues that television has "modernising" influences on society. Ferrara (2016) examines how entertainment media programmes can be used for achieving development goals. Rushton (1982) has argued that prime television can play a role in preventing domestic violence in the home because it can affect behavioural change. Ferrara (2016) asks "Can we use television to end poverty?" and answers in the affirmative. In South Africa, programmes such as *Soul City* have been at the heart of attempts to use television to drive behaviour change (Kin 2012:14). Prime time television such as *Scandal* can expose social ills such as domestic violence, or at least drive conversation on the hot topic issues. Prime time television is considered strategic because primetime is viewed as family time. It is not surprising that conversations about what people watch during prime-time television continue days after the airing of a particular episode (Kin 2012:14).

Soap opera is the most popular genre on South Africa's television after advertisements, news, reality, sports and music.[20] *Scandal* is currently watched by 4,8 million people in South Africa alone, according to etv's Prime Time viewing May 2016 statistics of the station's top 20 programmes watched by viewers from the age group

[20] Thelwell, E (2014-08-22) "7 things you should absolutely know about TV soapies", https://www.channel24.co.za/TV/News/7-things-you-should-absolutely-know-about-TV-soapies-20140822/ Accessed 22 January 2017.

15 years and above in the country (See Table 2.1 below). This is about 40 percent of etv's viewers share, which at that time was the highest out of its top 20 programmes that included news. News trailed on fifth position with only about 29 percent of viewership.

Top 20 Programs All Adults 15+
May 2016 Prime time 17h30-22h00

ADS15 U:33704 S:8332

Day	Date	From	To	Station	ProgrammeTitle	Genre	AR	Viewers	Share
ETV									
Wed	18/05/2016	1930	1958	ETV	Scandal	Soap	14.5	4877167	40.8
Sat	21/05/2016	1930	2117	ETV	Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked	Movi	11.2	3763629	39.8
Mon	23/05/2016	1900	1929	ETV	Rhythm City	Dram	10.4	3507373	29.8
Sat	14/05/2016	1930	2114	ETV	Alvin and the Chipmunks the Squeakquel	Movi	9.6	3247740	35.8
Sun	22/05/2016	1800	1801	ETV	E News Direct Headlines	News	8.4	2822181	29.3
Sun	08/05/2016	1805	1830	ETV	Mahadi-Lobola	Real	8.4	2817794	30.6
Sat	07/05/2016	1929	2120	ETV	Alvin and the Chipmunks	Movi	8.2	2775999	32.5
Tue	10/05/2016	2135	2205	ETV	Z'bondiwe	Dram	8.2	2754048	39.3
Sun	15/05/2016	1800	1801	ETV	E News Direct	News	8.2	2747837	30.8
Sun	08/05/2016	1658	1757	ETV	Wwe Wrestling Raw	Spor	8.1	2736406	34.2
Sun	08/05/2016	2000	2204	ETV	The Tourist	Movi	7.8	2633518	35
Sun	01/05/2016	1959	2208	ETV	Men in Black 3	Movi	7.7	2597558	35
Fri	20/05/2016	2031	2247	ETV	Drunken Master	Movi	7.6	2574902	32.4
Sun	22/05/2016	2000	2208	ETV	X-Men (Movie)	Movi	7.4	2482022	31.2
Fri	20/05/2016	2100	2105	ETV	The Powerball Draw	Quiz	6.8	2303300	23.8
Sun	29/05/2016	2000	2241	ETV	X-Men-First Class	Movi	6.8	2297600	34.4
Sun	15/05/2016	1830	1859	ETV	Double up	Musi	6.8	2288417	24.2
Sat	14/05/2016	1659	1758	ETV	Wwe Wrestling Smackdown	Spor	6.7	2258180	30.5
Sun	15/05/2016	2000	2223	ETV	The Green Hornet	Movi	6.6	2223186	30.7
Sun	22/05/2016	1830	1859	ETV	Double-up Mzansi	Vari	6.4	2166931	22.5

Table 2.1: Top 20 etv programmes (Source: https://bit.ly/2D9UJ3O)

Compared to other soapies in the country, *Scandal* is ranked fifth according to 2018 statistics of the most 10 watched soapies in South Africa (See **Fig 3** below).

Channel	Programme title	Genre	Viewership
SABC1	Uzalo	Soap	9 235 750
SABC1	Generations – The Legacy	Soap	8 734 120
SABC1	Skeem Saam	Soap	6 472 906
SABC2	Muvhango	Soap	5 377 540
e.tv	Scandal	Soap	4 665 488
e.tv	Rhythm City	Soap	3 453 575
SABC2	7de Laan	Soap	2 443 814
SABC2	Keeping Score	Soap	2 168 840
e.tv	Broken Vows (repeat)	Soap	1 482 287
SABC3	Isidingo: The Need	Soap	1 045 452

Fig 3: Ten most watched soapies in South Africa (Source: https://bit.ly/2Fz45aP)

However, people no longer watch television in traditional ways (Brown 2009:25). Rather, television watching – and media consumption in general – has evolved greatly, particularly with the advent of social media and online interactivity. People no longer watch television at specific times only, at specific places. Television is also no longer just a static set in the lounge. Rather, people watch television on the go, can record favourite shows, as well as participate on live Twitter and Facebook platforms. With the advent of platforms such as DVR, Netflix and OTT services like Roku, one can watch pretty much anything they want, any time they want. One interesting such phenomenon that has emerged in hybrid space between TV and social media is "social television". In the section below, I discuss social television.

Channel	Programme title	Genre	Viewership
SABC1	Uzalo	Soap	9 235 750
SABC1	Generations – The Legacy	Soap	8 734 120
SABC1	Skeem Saam	Soap	6 472 906
SABC2	Muvhango	Soap	5 377 540
e.tv	Scandal	Soap	4 665 488
e.tv	Rhythm City	Soap	3 453 575
SABC2	7de Laan	Soap	2 443 814
SABC2	Keeping Score	Soap	2 168 840
e.tv	Broken Vows (repeat)	Soap	1 482 287
SABC3	Isidingo: The Need	Soap	1 045 452

Table 2.3: Ten most watched soapies in South Africa (Source: https://bit.ly/2Fz45aP)

Gurak in (Baym, 2011: 8) contends social media allows even larger audiences to "talk" back to television programmes. Muellner (2013) is of the opinion that the reason social television is growing means people "inherently need each other to understand meaning". Despite who is watching television soap operas, the rise of social television continues as the Internet becomes the delivery mechanism that is fast becoming the preferred route to access television, radio and other content (Brown, 2009: 25). Brown notes that the blurring of channels is marketing devices by companies which have realised their messages receive a wider audience market if they are sent via multiple channels. It is not surprising that social television is increasingly being seen as a marketing tool to reach audiences to grow television advertising (Muellner 2013). Facebook and Twitter are being used in driving conversations about television content into social streams. Advertisers are able to target people posting comments about their television experience on Facebook or tweeting about them.

2.4.1 Social television

Basically, social television is the hybridised combination of television and social media (Gross, Fetter and Paul-Stueve 2008; Harboe et al., 2008; Metcalf et al., 2008; Shin, 2013; Chorianopoulos and Lekakos, 2008), and describes the use of online interactive platforms to access traditional media such as radio, television and newspapers. Pagani and Mirabello (2011: 43) describe social television as "an emerging new technology medium that supports and integrates social interaction, recommendations, ratings, reviews, and interactive participation among viewers via text chat, audio, or even videoconferencing". We take it as axiomatic that hundreds of millions of viewers now use smartphones, tablets and laptops to share their television experience with other viewers on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Social television is regarded as the latest evolution of "interactive television" and is a phenomenon that emerges since about 2012 when an upsurge of people started using the Internet to access radio, television and newspapers. This upsurge is what gave rise to so-called "social television". Brown (2009:25) describes the term social television as "the convergence of social media and television". The emergence of social television means television experience is no longer what it used to be when television was invented nearly a century ago (Brown 2009: 25).

Brown (ibid) argues that the Internet has become the preferred route to access, radio, television and newspapers and that, at any rate, interactive television gives audiences a more active experience to television viewing compared to the *passive viewing experience*, which was mostly the case during the pre-social media era (Walker 2016). The assumption is that the television experience that is plugged in to social media is more "participatory." Tablets, notebooks, laptops, desktops, smart phones and feature phones are being used to publish and receive information, giving audiences immense options in choosing what to read, listen, watch, comment and share through these tools and platforms. Viewers have the option not just to watch anything they want anytime and anywhere but also to talk about it in real time. Watching television is thus more of an interactive experience due to technology convergence (Evans 2011: 14). Audiences now have a choice on how, where and when they engage with television. Dawson (2007: 45) notes that television is no longer one screen but an amalgamation of many with viewers and content travelling across a range of technological platforms and media forms.

The new forms of viewing television are heavily linked with social media, which extends the viewing experience, enabling a viewer to engage in conversation or other forms of interaction with his or her social networks (Wohn and Kyung Na 2011). Social media gives the audiences an opportunity to "talk back" about what they are watching but goes further to allow audiences to interact with strangers and friends watching the same shows in different homes or locations via social media. A famous example is the *Big Brother* show. Evans (2011: 10) outlines the process thus:

> Rather than being confined to a single television show, the programme itself offered multiple sites for the production of meaning. The viewer could watch on television, or via the website, and then participate in deciding who should leave the programme via their mobile or landline phone.

With technological advancements, and market research that points to the reality that young people spend most of their time online, producers of soapies have turned to Web-based platforms as a way to keep existing viewers and get new ones (Levine 1985:201). Another boost for soap producers and networks have been that they can now use cross-platform distribution, in which they circulate current soap episodes via download services and engage in transmedia storytelling as a way of promoting the broadcast episodes and, potentially, of generating new revenue. In this case, the boundaries between Internet and television have since become blurred.

Previous research has centred on either television as a text or television as technology or both as well as effects research (Wohn and Kyung Na 2011). Ross (2008) study on television and the Internet through the concept of tele-participation is an interesting one in that it is somewhat similar to my study because it focuses on the gender dynamics of the two-television series she examines and the role the Internet played in the enjoyment of these shows (Ross 2008: 2). While this study is not seeking about the role of Internet in the enjoyment of *Scandal*, it is interested in the nature of "talk" or narrative that is produced as a result of the comments posted on Facebook after watching *Scandal*. Ross (2008:4) raises the issue of power and representation in the same way this study does because she argues that at a minimum social television

requires Internet access and literacy. The issue of representation and online identity will be discussed further in the theoretical framework Chapter.

Evans's (2011) examination of the expansion of the television experience onto the Internet and mobile phone and how audiences conceptualise television as a medium, and Wohn and Kyung Na's (2011) exploration of what types of messages people share with others while watching television, are relevant to my own study. Part of Evans's research focuses on audience participation in television drama via social media where audiences determine conclusion of particular story lines. Wohn and Kyung Na (2011) studied messages on Twitter, applying a uses and gratifications framework to explore what types of messages people share with others while watching television and how these messages correspond to the context of the programme they were watching. The difference is that whereas the two authors focus on Twitter, this study is concerned with Facebook and is not exploring at messages in general as we see in Wohn and Kyung Na, but investigating on "talk" that centred on gender-based violence and, in particular, intimate partner violence.

2.4.2 Contextualising the soap opera

Novels by Charles Dickens are probably the first books that were being read as magazine serials and not published books as early as the 1850's (Hobson 2003: 28). As technology developed and radio was devised in 1920, serial narrative was a strategy used to lure, especially women to daytime radio and advertisers (Allen 2001:2). Television soap operas emerged in the 1930's, following the invention of television. Soap manufacturers created programmes targeting housewives, to whom they advertised and hoped to sell their products (Hobson 2003: 8). It was presumed the housewives would watch the soap operas, shown during day time, when they were not performing their household chores. Some have gone as far as defining soap opera as a "feminine genre" (Harris 2006: 43). Allen (2001: 3-4) defines "soap operas" thus:

> The "soap" in soap opera alludes to the use of the serial form from its earliest days to the present as an advertising vehicle for laundry detergents and household cleaning products. The "opera" in soap opera signals a travesty: the highest of dramatic art forms is made to describe the lowest. (Similarly, western movies were called "horse operas" in the 1930s.

The first radio soap opera in America is credited to Frank Hummert and his wife, Anne Achenhurst (Hobson 2003:9). The story line was about challenges of marriage in modern society. Other themes such as divorce, child rearing, childlessness, fidelity and jealousy were later introduced (ibid).

In South Africa, the soap opera was introduced on television in 1990's and were mostly exclusively for white female audiences focusing on "feminine interests" such as family and romantic love (Burton 2012:222). Burton (ibid) speculated that the soap operas were not introduced earlier because the Apartheid regime could not "fathom how a woman centred genre could further the aims of its apartheid-era social and economic policies". Advertisers targeted women with products such as shampoos, adverts showcasing product ranges at retail chain stores, and time specific commercials such as Mother's Day (Burton 2012:222). Focusing on housewives and desires of white women was meant to promote dominant ideologies about race. All this changed with the coming of the democratic South Africa in 1994. Soap operas were beginning to be modelled around "Africanness" to promote African identity to change the way Africans are perceived and represented in the media (Burton2012:224).

Although early research on daytime serials criticised them for being "immoral", "unhealthy" and causing "anxiety" in viewers (Allen 1985: 21-22; Buckman 1985: 163), feminist epistemology on soap opera has helped in changing people's perceptions about the genre, awakening many to the reality that soap opera is not frivolous women's gossip but a complex, layered and meaningful genre that appeals to a variety of audiences (Baym 2000: 4). *Scandal's* Facebook page claims that *Scandal* "always reflects the realities of life in South Africa", something which, though it sounds like an exaggeration, accords well with the view that soap operas are not mere gossip but, rather, also contend themselves with complex and serious themes. The page goes on to claim that *Scandal* does not shirk from controversial issues: alcoholism, drug addiction, and depression – and the recovery processes; HIV and ARVs, sexual abuse, sweatshops, political activism and behind the scenes of investigative journalism.

Geraghty (2001:76) addresses the representation of women in soap operas, the pleasures and values offered to them, and the nature of themes, topics, and issues

the soap operas covered. The soap opera is thus viewed in some quarters as a feminist genre because of its historic links with women. Brundson (2000:173), one of the early scholars to view soap operas from a feminist perspective, examined how female viewers read or enjoyed soap operas. Brundson's work reveals that television watching is a cultural contestation that involves the active production of meaning by viewers (Ang 1996: 26). It has been argued that audience reception theorists that viewers see soap operas characters as living in situations similar to theirs. Spence (2001:188) argues that:

> Watching soaps is experiencing a fantasy which we believe to be true enough to warrant drawing moral conclusions, forming opinions, and comparing to what we know from the real world. The more detailed our experience is with the subject or similar subjects, the more likely that pieces of it will infiltrate the screen. One reason soaps are so compelling is that they make us believe that we are actually getting to know about people and life. However, at the same time they are clearly constructs. We know that it's not the same as our lived experience and the characters are not real people.

In the same vein, soap operas have also been viewed as community builders, empowering, a place for women's bonding (Blumenthal 2007: 51). Blumenthal found soap operas to fundamentally offer a "relaxing space" for women. This study, however, is not necessarily preoccupied with how women are represented per se but how soap opera as a representational system sparks social discourse and offers a gateway to insights about social change. As noted in Chapter 1, the main objective of this study is to seek the nature of the "talk" regarding selected episodes of the television soap opera, *Scandal.*

Thelwell (2014) observes that in South Africa, soapies are crowd pullers, ahead of sports, news and other programmes. They are considered to carry a message. Allen (2001:4) argues that soap operas are about exposing "dirt" because they deal with secrets such as extramarital liaisons, mistaken marriage and children given up for adoption. These issues are critical for my study because they are staple in soap operas precisely because they are meant to provoke talk among viewers (Brundson 2000:173). *Scandal's* Facebook page, indeed, confirms this mechanism: "*Scandal* has it all: provocative plots; conflict, confrontation and crisis; Intrigue; family feuds; true

love; shock surprises and shameful secrets; handsome men and beautiful women; villains, heroes and heroines; crime; coups and hidden agendas." Soaps themselves are set in places which maximise interaction and conflict, where characters congregate, such as in the media, hospital, law firms, police stations and places of entertainment. Episodes aim to keep storylines current and interesting and introduce plot lines which are controversial, social and moral.

Broadly, it can be discerned that soap operas are about the family or life within or between families (Hobson 2003:116). The soap opera's ability to combine content that is controversial and carry powerful storylines that provoke debate, is the reason why they are used to campaign against social ills in society. They take on difficult issues and, in the case of *Scandal,* are used as a channel and platform to dramatise the social dilemmas of domestic violence, hence the "talk" that happened on Facebook, which is the central subject of this study. Fans turned to *Scandal's* Facebook pages, to express their opinions about the soap opera's episodes on domestic violence. But just who was part of this "talk". Are they fans or audiences? We turn to this question in the next section.

2.4.3 Television audiences and fandom

It is now common for soap opera producers to create Facebook fan pages and encourage television viewers to continue conversations of their favourite programmes there, and to access updates. Fandom, described as a "base for consumer activists who speak back", who are "assertive" and "opinionated" about their favourite programmes (Jenkins 2005: 284), is the reason why the soap opera industry professionals "strive to create a moral text that will educate and enlighten as it entertains the audiences" (Blumenthal, 1997:111). Fandom is cultivated or encouraged by broadcasters to build stronger ties with performers and products (McQuail 2010: 442). Television soap operas partly gain brand identity because of loyalty from fans. Ross (2008: 3) contends that fandom is what drives television viewers to social media as they seek to share their experiences and be validated. Fans, of course, are also consumers (and products) who make money for those they follow. Both *Scandal* and Facebook are in the business first of all to make money.

It has been established that audience interaction on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter is what gave rise to social television. Audiences of social television often utilise the smart phones and laptops to watch their favourite television programmes, normally stimulating debate about what they will be watching in real time. Television, as a form of mass media, is regarded as facilitating the social construction of reality (Rushton 1982). Couldry (2011:231) flags the fact that because mass communication and peer communication now occur in the same media, there is now need of a re-think on the role of audiences. Further, Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2007:154) note that the rise of Internet technologies has blurred the definition of audiences. There is need for a "renewed scrutiny of the ground" and a close attention to the agency and reflexivity of the people we call audience members. As audiences are everywhere, they become increasingly indistinguishable and ultimately invisible (Couldry et al 2007: 157).

Ang (1996) forewarned that actual television audiences are inherently unstable and therefore not absolute or definitive and, indeed, declared that there was nothing called "television audience". She summed up her views in the following terms:

> Television audience is becoming increasingly fragmented, individualized, dispersed, no longer addressable as a mass or as a single market, no longer comprehensible as a social entity, collectively engaged and involved in a well-defined act of viewing. Indeed, television's proliferation has made it painfully clear that it does not make sense to speak about the 'television audience' as a neatly demarcated object of study (Ang, 1996: 57).

Ang correctly predicted at the time that the rise of new television-related technologies would provide people with new options and choices (Ang, 1991:55). Writing in the 1990s, the period in which early forms of social media were emerging, Ang (1991: 1) expressed concern that television viewer audiences were often ignored. She claimed audiences were "often spoken for or about from a position of distance – by critics, scientists, journalists, teachers, politicians, law makers, advertisers, television producers."

But what exactly is the definition of audience? According to earlier theorists such as Blumer {1939], in (McQuail, 2010: 58), it meant the public, or crowd and in small

groups, all its members who may share similar values. Audience for radio or television was seen as some kind of new “mass audience” which is heterogeneous because it lacks self-identity or the capacity of acting together, it was homogenous in the choice of some particular object of interest. The term mass audience meant large numbers of readers, viewers and so on. It also referred to widely dispersed, noninteractive and anonymous relation to each other, heterogenous composition, not organised or self-acting and an object of management or manipulation by the media (McQuail 2010: 59). Gorton (2009: 12) theorises that to make a definition, there is need to consider the following: level of activity; space, time constraints, accessibility, Interaction, proximity, concentration. McQuail adds to this list, observing that the definition can be in different and overlapping ways such as place (local media), people (appeal to a certain age group, gender or political group), type of medium or channel, genre and time.

It is also important to distinguish between the audience as a concept and audiences as people. While the term audience may not adequately describe the groups of people watching television or sharing posts on social media, the concept audience remains loaded with historical, cultural and political connotations (Gorton 2009:14). As a concept, the term audience points to people who are attentive, receptive but passive. Audience research and reception studies – and theories such as “uses and gratifications” – have long dismissed the assumption that audiences are passive. Rather, audiences are always actively engaging with and responding to issues. Facebook happens to be the latest platform that is now available for people to respond critically to mass media or any other forms and sources of talk. Livingstone and Hunt (2001:70) contend that audiences are ever more experienced, critical and sophisticated in their reception of the media as they become increasingly familiar with its forms and production processes.

The advent of new media has seen new forms of audiences and audience behaviour emerging. They are more interactive and searching rather than watching and listening (McQuail 2010: 398). The breakdown of the line between producer and consumer has added to the blurring of lines of who is actually an audience. Nightingale (2011:4) is concerned with whether Facebook users (for example) should be treated as a mass audience or as “produser” community. “Produser” being a term that refers to interplay

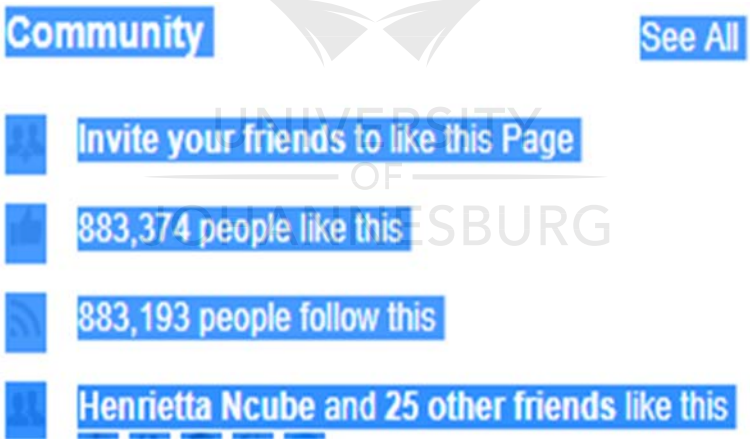
between media production and consumption. Facebook places communication in the hands of both producers and consumers in a way that was impossible prior to the digital era. It brings out what LeNoir (2003: 125) refers to as “role playing games” where audiences immerse and participate in fictional events, encountering new experiences and reflecting that we live in an era of “remake not replay”. The subject of audience is even more complex in this study because not only is it dealing with audiences in the context of social television, which in this case is the soapie, *Scandal*, but also with Facebook audiences who posted comments about specific *Scandal* episodes. The unique characteristic about such an audience is the live interaction through texts. LeNoir (2003:125) observes that in such cases audiences are responding to the fictional world and performers by creating real behaviours.

Audience members interact with each other in reaction to what they view on television or in response to subsequent Facebook posts. Lenoir (2003:125) argues that this has the effect of enhancing or disturbing the experience for fellow audience members. The important link of audience in this research is that they are the reason for the “talk” which is the subject of this study. Reading of media texts through the perception of audience is part of the modified kind of reception analysis which is offered in this study. It is a significant link because it is through audience that there is construction of meaning or sense making, which is central in this study. McQuail (2010: 406) reminds us that this only goes to show that audiences are not passive.

The word fan, an abbreviation of the word fanatic, “which” has its roots in the Latin word “fanaticus” (Jenkins 1992: 12), first appeared in the late 19th century in journalistic accounts describing followers of professional sports teams such as baseball. Jenkins (1992: 12) remarks it was also used to refer to women theatre goers, Matinee Girls, criticised for admiring actors rather than plays. The advent of social media has allowed fans to come together regardless of geographical boundaries, to discuss a show, films and the like (Baym 2000:215). The term convergence describes the multitude opportunities that currently exist to access television content (Evans 2011:14). Social television makes it possible to extend the television text beyond the story on the set (Ross 2008: 255).

Digital convergence has resulted in broadcasters resorting to the use of fan pages, which in the case of this study is the *Scandal* Facebook page, to lock in audiences and increase engagement. The result of these social media pages is that ordinary audiences are transformed into fans. Just like soccer fans follow their team, television audiences "follow" and "like" their favourite television shows. Such following and liking was previously impossible prior to the advent of social media. Baym (2000:14) who studied soaps, fandom and online communities postulates that viewers' eagerness to talk about what they view on television makes them an interconnected audience. Soap opera fans view Facebook fan pages as a place of social interaction where they talk with the rest of the *Scandal* "family" of fans as well as their Facebook "friends". As the methodology Chapter will show, *Scandal's* Facebook page becomes the focal point in this study because that is where the "talk" that is central to this research, takes place.

Scandal's Facebook page was created in 2005. By November 2016 it had garnered 814 054 Facebook "Likes" and over 400 subscribers. By January 2019 this figure was up to 883 194 as illustrated in the screen shot below.



Every weekday *Scandal* producers[21] summarise the previous show in a Facebook post. The Facebook page provides information such as the type of genre *Scandal* is, the awards which the programme has won, names of characters in the soapie, directors and writers of the programme, the schedule, the plot outline, and so on. Fans including individuals and organisations, log onto the page to "Like", share or comment about the post. Some comments also get commented on by other fans. Occasionally

[21] https://www.facebook.com/etvScandal/?fref=ts

fans also post images. Fans can also search for posts on this page or invite friends to like the page. The page also displays video highlights of previous shows including showing the previous night's full programme. It exhibits photos and gives information about events such as weddings done in the programme, announcements of achievements and competitions. It also offers livestreaming.

Facebook fan pages help to "develop a deep understanding of the state of mind and attitude of your audience" (Aaker et al 2010:87) and helps to build opportunities for conversations and feedback. Paltoglou (2014:8) calls it "mining opinion". Former US president Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2010 was one of the first to create dedicated and loyal fanbase on Facebook that drove discourse and created a brand identity around its favourite candidate (Aaker et al 2010: 77). The campaign had been started by the organisers who surmised that involving the masses would create commitment and a movement. The Obama campaign created a Facebook fan page to create involvement, participation and a sense of purpose for supporters. In this case, Facebook was not the message, but a vehicle. Aaker et al (2010:77) draws our attention to the fact that the fans of the Obama Facebook campaign" connected real people, with real enthusiasm, in real time".

It was of some interest to this study whether the same level of connectedness and enthusiasm is on show on the *Scandal* Facebook page. At the same time, not everyone who is part of the online audience is a dedicated fan. Rather, some are anti fans and trolls who take advantage of the anonymity that the Internet provides to vent and take conversations off topic. This shows on *Scandal's* page where not every conversation keeps to the script that the producers would prefer. Still, the openness of the Internet allows fans, anti-fans and trolls alike to express themselves. When fans "get involved" and talk about the past episodes on domestic violence on *Scandal*, Jenkins (1992:98) describes this type of "talk" as "meta text". Jenkins views the "talk" as an evaluation of the shows the audience are watching. According to (Fiske 1987: 78) meta-texts are meanings based on what resonates with the cultural needs of that particular talking community. It is what differentiate audience that just watches television and fans. Fans have knowledge of "interpretive conventions and collaborative meta-text used to read the show" (Jenkins 1992:278). In contemporary times fans attempt to integrate media representations into their own social experience

(Baym 2000: 17). They offer own interpretations, evaluations and set their own cultural canons. Jenkins notes that they blur boundaries between fact and fiction.

2.5 Summary

The chapter reviewed literature on the key concepts that are relevant to this study. The central theme of domestic violence and intimate partner violence was discussed in detail. It is this topic which provokes the “talk” that is the subject of focus in this inquiry. Other notable concepts that the chapter addressed included new media; social media; Facebook; the concept of talk; television studies; social television; contextualising the soap opera, television audiences and fandom. The chapter established that discussion on GBV is a pressing issue in the world but overly critical in South Africa where one woman is killed in eight hours. This according to WHO, is among the highest statistics in the world which justified the study's importance. The causes of VAW in SA are discussed in detail with apartheid, patriarchy and the silence that surrounds it singled out as major contributors. GBV is the topic of focus because of the "talk" which is at the centre of the study. To get a comprehensive understanding of the "talk" which happens on Facebook, it was necessary to discuss the digital media on which Facebook is located. A historical background of how media has evolved from traditional media to new media is explored. The coming of the Internet bred a number of social network platforms such as Facebook.

It was noted that the difference between old and new media is in the speed at which information travels or is disseminated. The more a medium of communication is used the stronger its influence. Facebook dominates the global social platform rankings. This is attributed to the proliferation of smart phones and tablets which has seen people consuming content at unprecedented rates. The new media does not necessarily replace the old, but they co-exist. In Africa, the traditional media, radio is still the medium of choice for most people. Social media was also reviewed. As people share information, ideas and opinions on Facebook, it is clear knowledge is at the centre of human social activity. Social relations shape human knowledge. To spread information on social networking sites such as Facebook, a three process of cognition, communication and cooperation is at work. The power for Facebook is in its numbers and this is because people use it to connect through talk. The Chapter established that Facebook is a tool to gain people's insights into a topic but importantly as a tool

to save lives or solve important social lives as well as behavioural change through spread of awareness and inspire action. It is also a place to bond, make sense of the world and fills a gap created by the lack of real face to face conversations. Sometimes people are just on Face book for fear of missing out. The Chapter also reviewed television studies as the talk being studied was spurred by a soap opera television episode. It was established that television programmes trigger conversations and help set the agenda for people's concerns. Prime time television is viewed as family time and is used by television producers to show television programmes that the producers feel should be watched by a broader audience. It is also a source of revenue for them via advertising. Prime time television is viewed as a vehicle for social or behavioural change.

The way people view television has changed. The accessibility of internet via smart phones and tablets enables people to watch television from anywhere. This a marketing tool to grow television advertising. Advertisers also target people who use Facebook to talk about their television experience. The sharing of television experience on social media has given rise to social television. This type of television experience is seen as participatory and interactive. Its targeted at people who spend most of their time online. Soap opera producers want to retain these people as viewers of their programmes and get new ones to grow their advertising revenues. The boundary between internet and television is blurred. The chapter also traced the history of soap operas to give the study a deeper context. Soap opera is used to highlight controversial or difficult social issues.

The view that soap operas are gossip forums for women has shifted. Soap operas have become crowd pullers ahead of other television programmes including news. They are considered to carry a message because they are about the family or life within or between families. They operate as a mirror of reality. The representation of women in soap operas has also evolved. There is a realisation soap operas are places for women's bonding and empowerment. Soap operas exist because of television audiences and fandom. The chapter outlines the thin line between audience and fandom. Fans are those that talk about their favourite programmes. They are different from ordinary audiences in that they keenly follow and engage with others about their

television viewing experience. They are important not only in building conversations, but in providing feedback to producers.

Fans are real people with real enthusiasm. Some are anti-fans who join the conversations to vent and take conversations off topic. This demonstrates to some extent the openness of social networking sites such as Facebook which give both fans and anti-fans and trolls opportunities to express their opinions. This transforms sites such as Facebook to cultural platforms where people read and interpret conversations according to their own cultural understandings. In general terms, the digital era has changed the way television is viewed in combination with social media platforms such as Facebook to engage in dialogues on topical issues. The nature of this viewer-cum-social media chat is the backbone of this study. The blurred lines on fans and audiences were foregrounded. The chapter articulates well with the next chapter, the Theoretical Framework, which draws together the conceptual and interpretive lenses that the study uses to understand social media talk.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is the theoretical framework of the study. It provides an outline of the interpretive framework and lens that is used to make sense of the phenomenon under investigation: social media talk about intimate partner violence, drawing from episodes of the television drama, *Scandal*. Broadly, the study adopts a feminist theoretical approach, curated in the context of representation and online identity. Within that broad framework, the study selects aspects of feminism that I regard as salient and relevant to my investigation, namely: black feminism, postmodern feminism, and cyber feminism. These combined strands are critical in foregrounding the fact that there is no one feminism but many plural and heterogeneous *feminisms*. All feminists share a basic commitment to ending female oppression, but no doubt do not approach the problem in the same way, even if gender, knowledge, and power are always *interrelated*. I shall go on to define my three choices and justify why they have been preferred and where they are relevant to my study.

Basically, I have preferred a three-pronged theory which employs black feminism, cyber feminism, and postmodern feminism because using a blended theory promises to open up rich opportunities to come up with an alternative feminism modelled to a particular context, issues and practices (Genz 2009: 19). What I am doing could therefore be called a black feminist online "anthropology": a conscious act of knowledge production and canon formation (McLaurin 2001: 1). Indeed, a Black feminist online anthropology "constructs its own canon that is both theoretical and based in a politics of praxis and poetics" (McLaurin 2001: 2). In as far as South Africa continues to top international rankings of incidence of gender violence, this study of social media "talk" is an intervention. It is part of what Britton (2006) calls "organising against gender violence in South Africa". As already noted, what is attractive about feminism is its heterogeneity: the *feminisms* angle. As noted in Chapter 2, seeking to define feminism has proven to be anything but simple (Mekgwe 2008: 13). Blending theory can lead us to developing a "new" theory – and developing "new" theory puts us in uncharted territory (Defrancisco 1997:38). Such uncharted territory promises

more reward than normative theory. Defrancisco (1997:39) proposes research that moves away from one universal power force to one that embraces differences which this proposed hybrid postmodern-cyber-black feminist theory intends to do. The chapter shall also look at incorporating the feminist approach into a reading of representation and online identity.

At the outset, it is worth pointing out that feminism as a political ideology never stays the same but is always changing and finding new and better avenues to utilise and explore. Feminism, as (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: xii-xiii) note, is a complex, consciousness-raising concept that constitutes "a central perspective for the study of gender relations". As a framework placed in the service of social justice, its core function as an approach is to remind us that we can imagine a world where women are full human beings who are not made in the image of patriarchy. It further reminds us that the broad discipline of gender studies "emerged from the identification that women as a group were misrepresented – in both the public sphere and in the conception of their 'real' natures" (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: xii-xiii). By adopting a feminist enquiry, I am naturally expected to justify its relevance. I have chosen feminism as a broad theory because a woman and her experiences are the central focus of the study. It seemed to me that feminist theory was the most appropriate. As a *politics* that regards women as generally subordinated and oppressed (McIlvenny 2002:2), the study of violence against Gloria fits the frame of the main issues identified by feminists for critique. I also expect that the feminist perspective will be manifest (Patton 2002: 133) in the interpretive tools I am going to use in Chapter 5.

It needs to be pointed out at the outset, also, that there is a general suspicion of feminism amongst African women, indigenous women and women of colour because the concept is, on the one hand, regarded as being a Western import that perpetuates whiteness and the invisibility of the oppressed of the non-Western world and, on the other hand, the concept has been castigated for losing sight of the interests of 'ordinary' women like Gloria. For black feminists, the dominant conception of feminism reflects white values and experiences and fails to consider how black women see the world. Mohanty (1991) (cited in Mekgwe 2008: 14) has argued that western feminist theory presents itself as a universal phenomenon, doing so in ways which disguise its profoundly western concerns and biases (Mohanty, Russo and Torres 1991: 53).

As Hill Collins points out in *Black Sexual Politics* (2004: 2), “gender, age, social class, and education do not matter if you are Black.” There are differences in penalty and privilege that accompany race, class, and similar systems of social injustice. Furthermore, it is not enough to imagine empowerment for black women in isolation from deep-seated changes in the overall social structure (Hill Collins 2004: 3). Gloria, interestingly, is both an African woman and an ordinary woman. She is an office cleaner. Comments about Gloria would therefore be scrutinised doubly: for how they read her race as well as her class. I thus hope in this study to avoid what Patricia Hill Collins regards as the narrowness of the white feminist analysis (Hill Collins 1990: 119). Even if we suppose that each Black woman has a common, shared struggle, the form it takes differs greatly as well as our responses to it.

Postmodern feminism in general opens up my study to a rich polysemy of ideas about women, the invisibility of power, the mediation of technology, and femininity. I found postmodern feminism suitable for my study because I tend to be more comfortable with plurality and multiple truths. As the world transitions from modernity, there is no one single hegemonic truth but, rather, multiple realities (East 1998). Cyber feminism, for its part, expresses the hybrid relationship between feminist theory and what is known as cyberculture, and is more concerned with how women are using the digital space. Cyber feminism is considered relevant for my study because of its interest in using technology to advance views, perspectives and experiences of women to combat oppression directed at women.

Finally, Black feminism, which emanates from a rejection by women of colour in the United States, to white feminism, is relevant because of the character of Gloria, an ordinary black African woman who works as an office cleaner. This choice is not without its contradictions. Davis and Tadia (2005: 3) observe that the designation “women of color” is a political category emerging out of U.S.-based struggles. As such, it cannot be expected to travel easily beyond the national boundaries of the US without contradictions or tensions. Nevertheless, the term has its uses, particularly in enabling “a political coalition of diverse, particular histories of struggle” of “Native American, Chicana/o, African American, Hawaiian, Asian American, as well as immigrant Third World women struggles”. At any rate, South Africa, newly emerging out of apartheid,

is as heavily racialised as the US. Gloria's body exists within similar frames of racial politics as those that face "women of colour" in the US and elsewhere. That said, the study draws on a strand of African feminism that is more organic to Africa. African feminism, broadly, is shaped by African women's resistance to Western hegemony. This cocktail of theories speaks to representation and online identity issues which the author discusses next.

3.2 Representation

Representation is important to my study because the central text that sparked the social media talk that I analyse consists of episodes drawn from a popular South African soap opera. How the episodes of intimate partner violence between Gloria and Obakeng have been represented is central to how they have been talked about on social media. A number of studies have looked at the convergence of feminism and representation in general and, in particular, with such "feminine" genres as soap opera. For example, in *Beyond the Frame: Women of Color and Visual Representation*, Davis and Tadiar (2005) draw on a framework of feminist criticism that interrogates dominant regimes of visual representation from the perspectives of women of colour. And, in a study of *Eastenders* titled "Feminist theory and the matriarchal soap", Aston and Clarke (1994) draw on feminist film theory to make sense of matriarchy and patriarchy in soaps. Here they draw on the Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze and visual pleasure. In this perspective, soaps are enjoyed only after identification of the spectator with "a main male protagonist". Modleski (1979: 12), in "Notes on a Feminine Narrative Form", argues that soap operas "invest exquisite pleasure in the central condition of a woman's life: waiting – whether for her phone to ring, for the baby to take its nap, or for the family to be reunited shortly after the day's final soap opera has left its family still struggling against dissolution".

In Chapter One and Two it was pointed out that the episodes under review were produced to mark the 16 days of activism against women's violence which are observed globally in November and December of each year. Soap operas are preferred for this kind of task because as a form of storytelling and a form of representation (Fourie 2008: 224) they centre and draw attention to the worlds of women. It was formerly thought that the nature of this attention was trivialising to women, but new directions in the scholarship of soap operas is alive to the power of

critique and resistance that is imbedded in soap operas. There is a historically important relationship of the soap opera and women.

For some scholars, soap operas offer a “social space” and a platform for discussion of women’s issues (Baym 2000: 16), in the same manner that novels elicit gendered intimacy and create private intimate spaces. The more critical point is that soap operas are no longer just being viewed as mindless melodrama or for less intelligent or affluent people (Baym 2000: 4). Whereas in the past watching soap operas was despised and regarded as a “feminine format,” watched by “powerless housewives” who have “a lower cultural status” (Dawoud 2014:140), there is a lot more recognition of the deeper issues of power and power relations, critique and resistance, that come to the fore in more feminist-oriented readings of soap operas. The likes of Baym (2000) have considered seriously the potential of soap operas to empower women. It is this aspect, it seems, that is directly connected to the reason why soap operas are also often used as channels for edutainment.

Representation is a complex topic. Blumenthal (1997: 5) equates soap operas to illustration of women’s culture. By concentrating on the topic of domestic violence, *Scandal* was attempting to mirror reality and also shape audiences’ understanding of reality. This is because television acts as a type of a mirror for reality (Baudrillard 1991: 28). Fourie (2008: 260) however, argues the media, like other symbolic systems, “are not simple reflections of some external, grounded truth”. Fourie calls media representations “mediated version” of reality because he argues that a television news programme “can never offer the whole of the reality” (Fourie 2008: 199). Although critics have traditionally faulted soaps “for their lack of social realism” (Modleski 1979: 16), the same cannot be said of the selected episodes from *Scandal*. The subject of intimate partner violence ensures that these episodes contain more than enough social realism. Feminist theory is critical of how masculinity privileges itself in such a way that women can only be affirmed by men. Gloria goes through psychological abuse as she tries to please her victimiser without success. For instance, she gets Obakeng a birthday present, which he rejects. She then tries to throw him a surprise birthday party, but he is unhappy with her effort. As he grows tired of Gloria, he becomes constantly critical of her, her habits, and her friends. He habitually and constantly lashes out at her.

Fourie (2008: 198) makes a distinction between representation as an act and representation as a theory. Apparently, an act of representation such as the making of a television programme is not the same as the theory of television programme. Fourie (2008: 198) elaborates that "the act of sign-making, of representing, of representation, is certainly linked to the theoretical discourse of representation. But sign-making can exist apart from the theoretical discourse." Fourie further asserts that this means that storytelling and image making will continue to exist whether or not academic scholars theorise on the processes or not. This study is interested in both kinds of representations. The subject of violence against women is both a representational and theoretical issue in this study. There is an assumption made by the producers of *Scandal* that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and reality. For instance, violence against Gloria represented all women living with this type of abuse. In terms of the 16 Days of Activism theme, Obakeng's character is an epitome of an abusive man while Gloria, whom he abuses, represents the almost one in three women in South Africa that faces violence from their intimate partners. After all, South Africa has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world (Isaacs 2014)

3.2.1 Online identity

Kellner (1995: 18) reminds us that "Social interactions and mass-produced images guide our *presentation of the self* in everyday life, our ways of relating to others, and the creation of our social values and goals". The act of posting comments and views on Facebook is a process of creating an online identity (Baym 2000; Howarth 2011). Baym (2000: 147) calls it a form of representing the self. This form of representation was a point of focus in the study, particularly in terms of how this online identity framed women. The media, whether old or new, plays a big role in shaping our lives. The new media has added identities based on online "social" interaction that are not only mass produced but are produced by media users themselves through internet social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Fourie 2008: 259).

In other words, these media are representational systems. Woodward (2002:74) tells us that representational systems help us to "make sense of both ourselves and of others" and are "crucial to the marking of both difference and sameness". Soap operas

are a form of representation via which viewers participate in identity construction. Social position, background and cultural orientation is central to identity construction. Fourie (2008: 266) notes that the context in which viewers consume media, have an influence on how they construct their identities in relation to media content.

Stuart Hall's and Michel Foucault's theories of the construction of identity illustrate that there is an inextricable relationship between representation and power. The avenue of representation and power is certainly one way of analysing online identity (Fourie 2008: 219). Foucault's focus on power through language is an important theoretical departure for this study. A number of studies report that narratives on traditional or new media are dominated by men (cf. *Global Media Monitoring Report* 2015).[22] Recent studies on user generated content such as social media, however, show a vastly different picture: women dominate use of Social Networking Sites such as Facebook more than men (Wiese et al 2014:3). There has certainly been a radical shift occasioned by social media.

The study intends to get insights into the way audiences talk about *Scandal*, without any attempt to profile the gender of participants. Whatever views were scrapped from Facebook were subjected to a feminist interpretation. As Vasilescu, Capiluppi and Serebrenik (2012:235) observe, online users often choose gender-neutral names, or opposite-sex avatars and names in order to negotiate a male-dominated space. The expectation that gender identity in online space mirrors that in real life becomes a potential blurred line. Gender deception is often the result of cyber harassment, where women will disguise their gender so as to articulate their views without fear (Choja and Nelson 2016). Choja and Nelson 2016 found that that women are largely victims of cyber harassment. They further point out that women are turned off by the blatant sexism of participants and compelled to leave these online communities.

The online world becomes an ambivalent space in which the fluidity of gender may be positive or negative, although others have been reported as feeling that the ability to create multiple and fragmented identities is liberating (Turkle 1995:184; Wolmark

[22] http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2015-reports

2003). As noted, women may at times be compelled to use gender-neutral names or "male profiles" to be accepted by the mostly male participants. Describing an account of gender swapping, Stone (1995:181) cites a disabled older woman who seemed to have a powerful and enabling effect on the many women who interacted with her on cyberspace. Eventually she was revealed to be a man and "her" followers online felt a sense of betrayal. These illustrations suggest that avatars are not self-representations in a constructed online space and thus are not really "real people". Arguing that online identities are difficult to define because of the blurring lines between bodies and technology, Turkle (1995:228) suggests that disembodied communication has the potential to free society from discrimination based on race, sex, gender, sexuality, or class.

So, are there actual people online? In trying to address this question, Sundén (2002:295) reminds us that textual talk takes place "in a rarely acknowledged borderland between talk and text" where language becomes the only thing there is. She describes textual talk as "texts", composed of written words, based entirely on the activity of reading and writing. Referring to those who go online for games, she says participants in online conversations in this space believe they are talking to "actual people" even if face-to-face is replaced with face-to screen and speaking and listening is replaced with reading and writing and physical touch with textual imagination (Sundén 2002:294). Her participants actually counted their encounters as face to face although this was purely a textual affair.

3.2 Contextualising feminism

It is common to hear people rejecting the label "feminist". Yet, defining any type of feminism is not that simple (Mekgwe 2008:13). Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) assert that the term feminism originates from the French word *féminisme*, which was a medical term used in the 19th century to refer to women with masculine traits. In the 20th century, the term was used in the United States to refer to a group of women "which asserted the uniqueness of women, the mystical experience of motherhood and women's special purity" (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004:48). Today the term, though "overburdened with meaning" (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 66), generally means someone who is committed to transforming women's subordinated social position (Mekgwe 2008:14). As an intellectual approach and a praxis, it simply aims to make

sure that women are not marginalised but are treated as full citizens and agential beings in all aspects of life (Mekgwe 2008:16).

Feminism has not remained static. Rather, the feminist debate has continued to undergo a constant, definite metamorphosis: time (first, second and third feminism waves), race (white women versus black women), class (elite versus working class women), culture (Western versus African), sexuality (straight women versus lesbian or transgender people) and religion (Christianity versus Islam) (Lincoln 2005; Gambaudo 2007: 95). The first two waves were mostly about attaining equal rights for women with civic and social rights (Gambaudo 2007: 94). The claim to equality was viewed to mean that there is sameness between men and women. Women were expected to have male like characters such as proactive, rationale and responsible but still possessing her feminine side of caring, maternal and supportive. Second wave feminists rejected to be defined as men but as people with different needs. Effectively they theorised the woman's situation (Gambaudo 2007: 95). This gave birth to various forms of feminisms. The following table gives a breakdown of some of the dominant feminisms (Tisdell 2008: 331-333).

In all these phases and types, there are counter arguments and conflicting positions but what is common among them is they all seem invested in challenging the oppression of women (Tisdell 2008: 331). The question of which women's story or lived experiences are being told becomes very critical. It becomes an issue of representation of who speaks on behalf of whom (Ang 1995). There are now several other feminisms that have *emerged* throughout the world, which are situated along geographical lines such as Afro-feminism, South African feminism (Morrelli 2016), French Feminism (Gambaudo 2007) or Australian feminism (Caine and Pringle 1995) or along racial lines such as black feminism or Western feminism.

Mann (2014:) examined the question, "What can feminism learn from new media?" He observed that traditional mass media and academia have "historically excluded, silenced, or heavily mediated/edited the words of black women". It is therefore vital to examine the content of these media platforms and channels (Mann 2014). The name new media may imply there is a lot of new things that we still need to learn from, particularly from a feminist perspective. The issues of feminism, representation and

online identity help to interpret the nature of contestations and struggles for meaning that go on social media. In the next section, we shall evaluate aspects of what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge is constructed.

Type of feminism	Description
Liberal	Generally believe in equality. For instance, equal work equal pay, but without taking a radical stance.
Radical	Sees patriarchy as the structural oppressor of women. Takes a radical stance.
Marxist	Sees power relations between dominant class groups as oppressors of women, on behalf of capitalism.
Socialist	Argue that it is not only patriarchy and capitalism that oppresses women but class and race
Standpoint	Focus on the role of power relations in shaping political knowledge.
Postmodern	Belief in the significance of hyperreal and free-floating signifiers of the individual, social structures, race, gender, class, and/or the forces of colonialism. These are intensified by digital technology.
Cyber feminism	Concerned with how women occupy the technology space, and such issues as access and voice
Black feminism	Rejection of being defined from a Western perspective but from their own black or African identity

Table 3.1: Table describing "dominant feminisms"

3.2.1 Black feminism

Black feminism as a theory emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to articulate the centrality of Black feminism separately from second-wave feminism of the 1970s, which marginalised black women. There has always existed a distorted picture of black women in mainstream academia which contributed to side-lining the Black female experience. Black feminism is mostly associated with the interventions of Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, Bell Hooks (Hooks, as part of her identity politics, prefers that her name be spelt in lower case letters), and Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the

term *intersectionality* to refer to the multiform ways in which class, race, and gender are inextricably bound together.

Angela Davis is famous as a former (incarcerated) Black Panther who has, her whole life, fought against structures of black domination in America since the Civil Rights era to the contemporary era where she writes and fights against the prison-industrial complex. Patricia Hill Collins came to prominent attention with the trailblazing text, *Black Feminist Thought* (1990). Hill Collins's view of feminism, says Mekgwe (2008: 14), is that "it is predominantly a white westernized experience that too often side-lines issues of racial difference, hence the imperative in her work to develop a Black feminist perspective which would more accurately reflect the realities and culture of Black women".

In 1982 Hooks published *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, a text that traced black feminism to struggles of the black female gender in, among other things, the slave experience. The use of the phrase "Ain't I a Woman" in Hooks' title refers back to abolitionist Sojourner Truth famous speech in 1851 when she spoke at a women's rights convention and challenged both racism and sexism faced by Black women by asking "Ain't I a Woman?" (Hooks 1982:137). The phrase itself is linked to the well-known abolitionist phrase "Am I not a man and a brother?" used by British abolitionists since the late 18th century to draw attention to the inhumanity of slavery. The contemporary #BlackLivesMatter Movement can be traced to Black feminism as it has existed since the antebellum period in America.

Black feminist theory emerges as a rejection of white feminism by women of colour in the United States drawing largely on the slave experience but also on the Civil Rights era with the emergence of such figures as Rosa Parks. At the same time, the Civil Rights movement itself is seen as having marginalised women, and thus black feminism adds the black female voice and experience to the Civil rights discourse. Black men and women, though both are affected by racism, are affected in *gender-specific* ways. That is, racism *has* gender-specific contours. In Hill Collins's (2004: 5) view, these contours are more pronounced today, particularly at a time when racism is no longer the monolithic thing of the 1960s:

> Recognizing that racism even exists remains a challenge for most White Americans and, increasingly, for many African Americans as well. They believe that the passage of civil rights legislation eliminated racially discriminatory practices and that any problems that Blacks may experience now are of their own doing. Violations against Black men and women continue to occur, but one-third of African Americans have moved into the middle class and Black people are more visible in positions of authority in schools, companies, hospitals, and government. Many Black people have difficulty seeing their connections to other Black people.

This is also the case in South Africa where the end of apartheid has brought about a generalised perception that racism is no longer as widespread as in the period before 1994. At the same time, privileged South Africans who live in the suburbs have seen their worlds morph into white worlds and do not attach the same significance to racially discriminatory practice. Interestingly, Hill Collins's comments were made in 2004. In the period between 2015 and 2019, racism seems to have returned with a vengeance, and become monolithic again, as signified by #BlackLivesMatter. Even in South Africa, incidents of racism trend in the news and social media with regularity.

Central to the articulation of black feminism is the notion of black female solidarity and black sisterhood. As Morgan (1970) points out in a book of the same name, "sisterhood is powerful". The challenge of conceptualising feminism in Africa has been remarked on (Nkealah 2006), partly reflecting an anxiety to address the co-called crisis "intellectual dependence" (Alatas 2000). No one wants to be labelled unoriginal. "Feminist practitioners", as Mekgwe (2008: 12) points out, "did not simply seek to emulate their western feminist counterparts." As such, African feminists have sought to excavate local "libraries" (Zeleza 2006) that resonate with African realities. Since Western feminist research tended to group all African women as one homogenous group (Antrobus 2004: 124), African feminists emphasised the "fluid character of African feminism" (Mekgwe 2008: 11).

The likes of Chioma Steady (1981), Amadiume (1997) and Oyewumi (2005), in this regard, have contributed to black feminist theory in what I would call *an African key*. Their contributions specifically attempt to address and capture – in a nuanced way – the realities, contexts, experiential cultures and hybrid experiences specific to black women in Africa, particularly through the concepts of *matrifocality* or *matricentricity*

(Adesina and Adesina 2010), while at the same time producing an *epistemic rupture* from Western theories of gender. There is a danger that, without the grounded interventions of African feminists, black feminism would continue to be dominated by the diasporic strain. After all, Black women in Africa are often portrayed (or neglected) in Western feminism as a "powerless" group (Antrobus 2004: 124). "Although agreeing with the politics of feminism", says Mekgwe (2008: 17), "most women writers in Africa have rejected the feminist label while others have vacillated between endorsing the label and refuting it".

Nevertheless, I locate African feminism, shaped by African women's resistance to Western hegemony, as part of the same matrix of black feminism. Whereas black feminism has a strong and unmistakable diasporic (some would say Anglo-American) orientation, it is unnecessary to divide the struggles of black women on the basis of geography. Black women's oppression is shifting all the time and becoming more complex, and it is not necessary for black women to fight over boundaries. My choice of blended black feminist theory necessarily centres Africa and the experiences of African women, for obvious reasons. Oyewumi (2005:9), for instance, stresses that the study of gender in Africa, if it is to be relevant, needs to be based on the ideas that originate from the continent. Chioma Steady (1981) regards African feminism as emphasising female autonomy and co-operation; nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship (Mekgwe 2008:16). Renowned Afrocentrist Cheikh Anta Diop (1989) has emphasised the need for African people to be understood "within their own self-constructed status and identity and as creators of their nations". In this section I am thus going to make the political choice to use black feminism interchangeably with African feminism.

Certainly, power over women and oppression of women have proven to have multiple vectors (Crenshaw 1989, Crenshaw 1991), and thus solidarity is paramount. The idea of black *sisterhood* is important in healing fractures and division. It is divide and rule tactics, after all, that exacerbate the abuse of African/black women. Fundamentally, I believe that the diversity in black feminism – which makes us speak not just of black feminism but, rather, black feminisms – is to be celebrated, rather than deplored. It is a strength, rather than a weakness. Even men are now open to partner with feminists, or even to call themselves feminists and identify publicly with the feminist agenda

(Antrobus 2004:148-149; Mekgwe 2008:17). I thus prefer (as pointed out in the first section of this chapter) a *blended* feminism. That is, I am more comfortable with a hybrid – and hybridised and hybridising – theory which accommodates a rich diversity of feminist views and articulations. For instance, Morrell (2016:205), who observes that there was no single South African feminism but many plural and racially divided feminisms, borrows from European and American feminism as well as South Africa's localised circumstances and perspectives to come up with a "Southern theory" which is itself a version of South African feminism. This expanded matrix of feminism allows us to see, for example, how resistance against apartheid in South Africa or the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe not only gave women a strong voice (Geisler 2004) but essentially demonstrates how the tradition of female and gendered resistance to Western domination can be fruitfully traced to such heroines as Mbuya Nehanda, Modjadji and Queen Nzinga, among others.

Black feminism is by no means homogenous. By asserting the "blendedness" of black feminism, I do not mean to say black women's experiences of oppression are monolithic. No feminist theory or brand of feminism is a one size fits all, and none of those I have listed is justified in parading what could only be a fake universality. Rather, I observe, with Mekgwe (2008: 21), "the need to espouse a theoretical model that is able to contain the varied positions; a model that will be fluid without being so pluralistic as to defy definition." As Spelman (1988: 14) contends, "even if we say all women are oppressed by sexism we cannot automatically conclude that the sexism all women experience is the same". The politics of difference, as Ang (1996) defines it, does not mean "giving up on community or solidarity sisterhood". It would seem that, when all is said and done, feminism has – as it were – come of age.

Certainly, the breadth of feminist issues is now broader across a range of political, social and cultural issues. There is space within feminism for a body of theory and politics that allows both for pluralism and difference (Brooks 1997:1; Braithwaite 2004:27). At the same time, there is constant re-writing of feminism itself, because it is never static or fixed. Thus my "blended" choice is simply so that one finds a theoretical starting point and theoretical coherence, without which the field of feminism becomes a conceptual jungle. It is also serving to strengthen the study by accommodating as much of the black female experience as possible. I concur with

Hooks (2000: 2) that “without an agreed upon definition, we lack a sound foundation on which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis”. It is in this sense that the UN’s attempt to come up with a standard definition of violence against women has been regarded a useful starting point (Geisler 2004: 10).

Certainly, the diasporic black feminists have a lot to learn from their African sisters. Amadiume has consistently argued that African feminism is not constrained by patriarchy but, rather, has its own strong countervailing matriarchy-based values that balance and counterbalance the male female power relations. Gender is not so much a war of the sexes (the classical Western Mars vs. Venus binary) as a *negotiation*. Adesina and Adesina (2010:2) point out that *matricentricity* in Amadiume’s works accounts for the structural and ideological conditions of many African societies. Amadiume (1997) draws on the concepts of “matricentric unit” (1997: 18) or “matriarchal principle” (1997: 36) as her organising concepts to make sense of gender relations in Africa. African societies, she argues, are *structurally matricentric*, and our feminist analyses must start here. Oyewumi (2005:8), for her part, has argued that the category of women is not a synonym of gender at all in the Africa setting. That is, she argues that gender is not biologically determined, and social categories are not gender specific. The categories “wife” and “husband”, for instance, are not sex specific (Oyewumi 2005:8; cf. Amadiume 1998).

In Yoruba cosmology, for instance, one cannot place a person in a certain category by merely looking at them. Rather, identity is more complex, context-specific, and grounded. Oyewumi 2005: 14). Oyewumi (2005) and Amadiume (1997) argue that African contexts are able to demonstrate the standard-ness of the assertion (first brought into the mainstream by Simone de Beauvoir) that gender is socially constructed, but that this critique is complicated by the fact that “gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization by the West... Rather, the primary principle of social organization was seniority defined by relative age” (Oyewumi 1997: 31). If it is standard that gender is socially constructed, then gender cannot behave the same way across space, time and culture.

So-called “Ubuntu feminism” (Connell and Van Marie 2015), with its South African origins, has emerged in this context-specific vein. Such a theory is grounded in the

discourse of Ubuntu (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – I am because we are) and is less panicked by the presence of patriarchy but tries to negotiate within African traditional mores and realities. Ubuntu feminism is also not confined to the strictures of liberal feminism as drawn from second wave feminism. Rather, it offers (or the authors claim that it offers) an "authentic", or at least grounded, Southern African experiential lens that is more relevant to local conditions and histories. At least, such a theory promises to offer a local solutions to the dilemmas that European and Western feminism cannot resolve.

Still, just because Africa has home-grown feminist theories does not mean that they are acceptable to all. Ubuntu itself is contested (cf. Mboti 2015). Furthermore, not everyone is comfortable with the universal label "feminism". Rather, some people are comfortable addressing issues to do with feminism without calling them so. As Hooks in (Antrobus 2004:144) contends "we can live and act in feminist resistance without ever using the word feminism". Antrobus argues many distance themselves from it and yet use feminist analysis and strategies in their work. In this Chapter, I also take this view that what I call my theory is less important as the content of such a theory. Ultimately, I do not think that there is much use fighting over labels if we are already persuaded that feminism materialises as *praxis*.

In general, the critique of patriarchy ("rule by the male head") and its close relation, masculinity, are crucial in understanding the general feminist critique of power relations, gender relations, sexual politics, and of the reproduction of femininity (Hartmann 1981:3). Hartmann defines patriarchy as:

> A set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical, and men of different classes, races or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they are also united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination. Hartmann (1981:11)

Fundamentally, men maintain this domination or control over women by excluding them from access to essential productive resources, and by restricting women's

sexuality. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004:93) define patriarchy as a social system of masculine domination over women. Masculinity, on the other hand, is described as the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with *being* a man (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004:82; Beasley 2005: 178).

Masculinity is linked to patriarchy in the sense that men tend to benefit materially and socially from patriarchy. It is in this sense that radical and Marxist feminists have viewed patriarchy as a concrete problem to women's general well-being and progress. Radical feminists, for instance, claim patriarchy reproduces masculine control over women's bodies through sexuality or male violence (Pilcher and Whelehan: 2004: 111). Marxist feminists locate capitalism in the matrix of patriarchy and masculinity, particularly in as far as capitalism is said to be controlled by patriarchs who undermine women's work, including unpaid labour in the home. Anthias and Davies (1995) have, for instance, criticised Walby (1990) for treating capitalism, race, class and patriarchy as independent from one another. To them, identifying this matrix is crucial for feminist critique. That is, patriarchy and capitalism are viewed as systems of oppression which benefit from women's subordination (Hartmann 1979).

To a degree, black feminism and African feminism show uncanny solidarity when it comes to a shared mode of critique of patriarchy and masculinity, particularly as it is implicated with – and complicated by – power and the way it reproduces femininity. Such a mode of critique is broadly sensitive to histories of black people and to a nuanced reading of the place of black people within modernity. That is, the critique of patriarchy by black feminists does not always follow the contours of how Western feminism does it. Indeed, some black feminist theorists consider the concept of "patriarchy" with suspicion, as a Western creation (Amadiume1997:101; Geisler 2004:13; Mikell 1997:336). Partly, this is because white women have participated in the domination of white men over black peoples in general. There seems to be a need to distinguish between the circumstances of black and/or African women, on the one hand, and those of white, Western women, on the other. Certainly, voices of women in Africa continue to be diminished in specific ways by the patriarchy-matrix when it comes to opportunities for women's participation in public life (Mikell 1997: 336). Different forms of patriarchal violence continue to mark and reduce African women's effective participation.

Shifting modes of patriarchal domination of African women continue to manifest themselves. For instance, some African governments normatively view women's groups and movements as political threats (Mikell 1997: 337). Visibility for African women who seek independence from men, or who opt for leadership or to break the glass ceiling, comes with a cost. In general, research shows that women remain easy targets of violence, exclusion, victimisation and abuse. Walby (1990: 201) argues that women's household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and culture altogether "capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of women's subordination". Basically, such gendered violence is often systemic. For instance, it has been suggested that there is a correlation between violence against women and economic deprivation (McFadden 2007). This is seen where violence against women is prevalent in African countries beset with high unemployment (McFadden 2007).

Certainly, what is meant by masculinity or femininity is the subject of continuing interrogation. This includes the critique of the notion of gender itself. Such a critique is important study because this study uses the term "gender" often. Gender does not denote "biological or anatomical differences between men and women" (this would be sex) but is concerned with the psychological, social and cultural *difference* between male and female (Giddens 1989: 158). As Hill Collins (2004: 6) notes, talking about gender does not mean focusing solely on women's issues. Rather:

> Men's experiences are also deeply gendered. Thus, gender ideology not only creates ideas about femininity, but it also shapes conceptions of masculinity. Regardless of race, ethnicity, social class, citizenship status, and sexual orientation, all men and women encounter social norms about gender. These norms influence people's sense of themselves as men and women as well as perceptions of masculinity and femininity

Giddens (1989) argues that it makes no sense to assume that there is merely one set of traits that generally characterises men and thus defines masculinity; or likewise, that there is one set of traits for women which defines femininity. Essentially, the femininity/masculinity binary is loosened and, indeed, thrown into some confusion. At the same time, as Hill Collins (2004) points out, for Black people, the relationship

between gender and race is intensified, producing "a Black gender ideology" that shapes ideas about Black masculinity and Black femininity.

In my reading, it is in the critique of the femininity/masculinity binary that African feminism is strongest. For instance, Amadiume (1998) and Oyewumi (1997) have built a strong scholarship that rejects the traditional binarities between masculine and feminine, and what she sees as the deliberate but unacceptable and distorting *masculinisation* of African societies. Oyewumi argues that the Yoruba language is not gendered, and categories such as "male" or "female" do not translate easily in the language (1997: 33). The situation of patriarchy as a central concept in feminism theory is problematic because it assumes that patriarchy is universal, overlooking cultural difference. That is, it appears to assume that gender relations between men and women are the same everywhere. Yet patriarchy need not *mean* the same thing everywhere, for everyone. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004:36) go further to criticise the assumption that gender relations are only between men and women. In fact, gender relations are also between women and women and men and men.

Amadiume and Oyewumi's writings highlight how Western scholarship about Africa in general traditionally tended to ignore the important role played by the matriarchal system (for example, the masculinisation of language in the use of pronouns such as "man" and "mankind"[23]). Amadiume insists that such a system would be complimentary to patriarchy. Amadiume (1998: 101) postulates that:

> Patriarchy and matriarchy are social and political ideologies which directly decide the role and status of women in society, how society is to be organised and how social subjects are to relate to one another. They are also ideologies which decide the degree of violence and abuse of human rights that is permissible in society. Matriarchy, as was constructed by African women, had a very clear message about social and economic justice.

Whereas Western patriarchy seeks to control and rule women, this is not the case with *matrifocal* African "patriarchy". Rather, African patriarchy is much more complex and nuanced. Whereas patriarchy, as framed in a Western lens, is problematic because it

[23] Fortes (1959), writing about African religion, uses such nouns in his references to the Tallensi Kinship of Nigeria.

celebrates violence, valour, conquest and power, and is generally oppressive, African women did not experience patriarchy quite this way. African women had more authority, power, and autonomy (Amadiume 1997; Geisler 2004; Mikell 1997). It is in this sense that Amadiume speaks, for instance, of “male daughters” and “female sons”. Black feminists, at any rate, have never regarded as sufficient the analysis of patriarchy in the absence of race and the history of colonialism, empire and slavery (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 96). There is, therefore, increasingly more inclination towards using “patriarchy” only as an adjective to describe individuals or institutions that exploit women rather than view it as a central concept of gender theorising (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004: 96).

There is some scope to extend the discussion of how patriarchy is normatively regarded in the West as opposed to the matriarchal tradition in Africa. Much of the scholarship traces the source of virulent masculinity to colonialism (Amadiume 1997:132). At least, colonialism is blamed for removing African women from the public domain by, for instance, encouraging men to take over the agricultural production which African women were in control of, and peripheralising women through training them in home crafts (Amadiume 1997:111). The loss of African women’s economic power and their general economic peripheralisation under colonialism resulted in acute male domination (Geisler 2004:14). Geisler traces the persistence of a strong strain of gender-based violence in Africa to this origin. For this reason, Walby (1990: 201) argues that patriarchy cannot be considered to be defeated yet until systemic oppression of women is at an end. Although many women are no longer restricted to the home (or the kitchen), they still face exploitation through pervasive patriarchal social and economic structures. These include new technologies such as online and digital technology. This consideration leads us to the next section where I discuss cyber feminism.

3.2.2 Cyber feminism

The internet is a defining medium of our modern times because it is a medium of both mass and personal communication (McQuail 2010:41) Participating on the internet has given rise to cyber culture. Cyberculture defines the various social and cultural phenomena that arise from the widespread use of information technology in modern society (Negroponte 1995; Castells 1996, 2001) Chatting on social media, for

instance, is an instance of cyberculture. The interest in this study goes further than just an interest in the cyberculture of social media talk, to explore the dynamics of such interaction in relation to intimate partner violence. The term cyberculture is a portmanteau of "cyberspace" and "culture". [24]Hawthorne and Renate explain that cyberspace refers to widespread, interconnected digital technology. They point out that the term cyber is a Greek word for "governor" or "gubernatorial". Hawthorne and Renate further elaborate that the original meaning of cyber is to "steer" as one would "steer a boat". It's connection to technology is in the area of "navigation, mapping, steering one's way through the World Wide Web". The governing aspect is who governs it (Hawthorn and Renate).

There is a myth that the Internet is self-governing but is it? Cyber feminism is interested in those issues. Wolmark (2003) has characterised cyberspace as a "tool to examine our very sense of reality". The relationship between feminist theory and cyberculture is complex for the reason mentioned earlier, that the oppression of women persists through pervasive patriarchal social and economic structures. There is a tendency to think that technology is neutral, value-free, and innocent. It is not. Rather, it is implicated with power and power relations which is why some view digital technology as a tool for women's empowerment, access and participation (Hawthorne and Renate 1999:2). However, others are more sceptical; they view digital technologies as continuing traditions of gender violence and exploitation (Stormer 2004: 269). Because many people now turn first and increasingly to Internet when searching for information (Hinman 2005:21), there are also concerns that the digital divide behind the inequality in accessing information on the Internet may affect women acutely since they are traditionally excluded from being in the centre of productive relations (Segev 2010:5). Women may either have their opinions ignored or shouted down in important online conversations or may be unable to access the Internet altogether.

Cyber feminism is a variant of feminism which acknowledges the differences in power between men and women in technologically dominated digital discourse (Hawthorne and Renate 1999:2). Early studies on cyber feminism centred on the masculinisation

[24] Hawthorne, S & Renate, K (2013). Cyberfeminism. https://ces260jh.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/hawthorne-klein.pdf/ Accessed January 12, 2019

of cyberspace, citing women's access to technology as a huge limiting factor in terms of women creating their own definitions (Segev 2010:5). Cyberfeminists utilise approaches to the study of digital discourse that normatively consider the internet to be a masculine space within which access and the agency of women is limited. Studies of the masculinisation of the cyberspace, for instance, acknowledge that knowledge is socially constructed, and gender is crucial to that construction (Wolmark 2003). Maynard (1997:5) notes that the gendered nature of scientific knowledge seeks to take account of the way in which the knowledge both produces and is produced by existing relations of power. Some early studies suggested that women were reluctant to go online, are less confident of their abilities when they do so, less participatory in online discussion groups and less represented among computer network policy makers and designers than men (Herring 1996: 105). Some of these early studies even went to the extent of citing the fear of having their devices infected by computer viruses as one way in which cyber technology can scare women from participating fully in digital spaces, thus perpetuating masculine control Herring (ibid).. With the near-inevitability of internet use across the world, the fear of the internet by women suggested by these early studies seems dated.

Cyberfeminist research in general starts from a point of view of assessing how and why women use computer technologies, for instance, Guntarik and Trott (2014) examined what forms of online political participation exist among Thai women. In as far as cyber feminism concerned with the voice or voicelessness of women online, it utilises approaches that regard the Internet as a public sphere, counter public sphere, or feminine (or female friendly) space (Gajjala 2004:76). The issue of online spaces as a public sphere for women considers the issue of women-centred online spaces where women may contribute their views in safe spaces. Gajjala has argued that:

> When we speak of women centred environments…there is an implicit assumption that there will be wonderful conflict-free spaces. Yet are not the unsaid conditions for the erasure of conflict and the creation of consensus equal to the erasure of dissenting voices and the performances of a lack of hierarchy based on the silence of many others? (2004: 76)

Gajjala (2004: 29), who researched specific online debates about women's issues, wanted to find out how much Internet access women had and whether they were

finding a “space from which to speak from”. What kinds of discourses are marginalised? What complicities and resistances get articulated through the struggles for control over meaning in such spaces? Who is absented, disappeared, silenced and why?

The Internet has been seen as a space that is empowering to diverse discourses and marginalised groups (Creswell 2009), but also as one that can harm “talk”. This is because patriarchy and masculinity may also be reproduced online. Hall (1996) has observed that:

> Male participants are said to accomplish this by “ignoring the topics which women introduce, producing conversational floors based on hierarchy instead of collaboration, dismissing women’s responses as irrelevant, and contributing a much higher percentage of the total number of postings and text produced (Hall 1996: 154).

The aspect of discourse in cyber culture is particularly important because men and women appear to have different communication strategies both online and offline.[25] As the interface between the body and technology is re-defined, cyber feminism has also become interested in the Internet as a bodiless space where gender swapping is possible. This interest is associated with the cybertheories of Donna Haraway (1991), for whom cyber feminism is anchored in postmodern feminist thought.

Cybertheory has brought to the fore the issue of the collapse of boundaries and fixed categories of meaning due to the proliferation of online worlds. For instance, when texting or chatting online the body is apparently freed from the physical and completely enters the realm of the *symbolic*, or the symbolic real (Reid 1994). In this symbolic realm, textual bodies move freely and imaginatively “with a fluidity that does not seem to have any limits” (Reid 1994). It seems as if the physical body ceases to exist. There

[25] Cameron (1997: 26) notes that communities identify particular speech styles or genres as typical of women or men. Lakoff (1975) suggests there is a gender specific way of speaking which displays femininity linguistically. This kind of talk apparently takes up “less space”, makes “fewer demands” and is “weaker"” and “less aggressive than boys”. How language is used is part of seeking meaning, and this study has a great deal of interested in this. Ochs (1974), on the other hand, associates women with more direct styles and men with indirectness. Lakoff and Ochs’ views appear to be generalisations which cannot be confirmed empirically, not least because discourse differs from community to community.

is thus an aspect of freedom associated with being online. There is, however, some dispute about whether physical bodies actually get erased when we are online (Hall 1996:154).

3.2.3 Postmodern feminism

This last aspect about "bodiless consciousnesses" leads us to the last element of my blended feminist approaches that I shall utilise in this study: postmodern (and deconstructionist) feminism. Postmodern feminism is not easy to define (Gens 2009:24) and does not offer neat answers. What it is considered by its proponents to be good at is putting a range of complex and thought-provoking questions out there. It does not seem to me to be a new feminism but, rather, one that holds potential for ceaseless innovation. Hence:

> Postmodern feminism's changeable life indicates a move away from easy categorisations and binaries, including the dualistic patterns of (male) power and (female) oppression on which much feminist thought and politics are built (Gens 2009: 24).

The polysemy offered by postmodernity allows for a "recognition of the presence of power in the formation of knowledge and an understanding that the self is socially constructed in the context of narratives created by society and the self" (East 1998). Welded into this approach is a deconstruction perspective which seeks to expose "supposed truths and grand systems of belief by unravelling a text to reveal its assumptions, contradictions, or inconsistencies" (East 1998). The purpose of deconstruction as East says, is "to create multiple meanings and to determine perspectives that are marginalized or not named". Postmodern feminism offers a "renewed meaning" of feminism "rejection of a single truth" "replaced by multiple realities" (Kostikova 2013: East 1998). A postmodern inflected critique also allows the current study to consider how new media and cyberculture give individuals autonomy to express their views in ways that never existed pre-social media.

Critics note, of course, the danger of distortions within the "post" feminisms that may be read as alternatives (or even contrary) to feminism and its social and political agenda. One is also wary of the circulation of a kind of "free market feminism" that "sells women an illusion of progress by appropriating and co-opting feminist notions of

empowerment and choice" (Genz 2009:21). However, "post" feminism does not parade itself as an alternative to feminism but, rather, advances an alternative understanding and aids a new construction of feminine identity (Kostikova 2013). That is, "post" feminism should not be taken to mean feminism ceases to be a political movement aimed at social justice. Rather, it emphasises situatedness, within a specific time and place (Genz 2009: 24). It is this time and place that has been fragmented by the logics of Facebook ("Likes", "friending", "unfriending", and so on). How does the time and "place" (or placelessness) of Facebook change the way we "talk"? Is talk on Facebook really placeless?

To some, such as Denfeld (1995: 2), the term postmodern feminism suggests an "ending" to feminism or its "failure" and loss of validity. Such an end comes about because there has allegedly been an overachievement of feminism, to the extent that feminism is no longer relevant in young women's lives because there are equal opportunities everywhere. However, this is not necessarily true. The quest for gender equality and to end gender violence is even more urgent today (Geisler 2004: 209). As noted earlier, research shows that women remain easy targets of violence, exclusion, victimisation and abuse. Furthermore, gendered violence is often systemic. As Walby (1990: 201) points out, women's household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and culture altogether "capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of women's subordination". Some battles might have been won, but one senses that it is disingenuous to declare the war won. While there may be a general acknowledgement of feminist rights in many African countries, women are still generally discriminated against and the provision of equal opportunities across the socio-political and economic strata is still limited to such interventions such as women's quotas.

Many African countries have enacted laws against domestic violence but have not afforded environments and spaces that allow many women to take advantage of these laws. Part of the problem seems to be a lack of knowledge about these laws and interventions, as well as fear of reporting cases, and male chauvinistic attitudes at police stations and courts (Sibanda-Moyo et al 2017:66). South Africa, as noted, has one of the highest incidences of domestic violence in the world – evidence of persistence of violence against women which affects women's participation in all

sectors of society. An area seemingly as mundane as the sharing views and opinions bespeaks the nature of the silences that women find themselves relegated to. Institutions such the Graça Machel Trust, a Pan African civic society non-governmental organisation on women's and children's issues, with a footprint in 16 African countries, has formed women networks in various sectors of the economy in an attempt to leverage opportunities for women.[26] Such initiatives point to the dearth of opportunities for women and the states of depression of women's rights in many African countries. Antrobus (2004) and Geisler (2004) draw our attention, in fact, to a reality of underachievement in women's movements. At least, they argue that young women in Africa no longer see women's movements as relevant or they feel excluded.

As Braithwaite (2004:27) notes, feminism may leave women in an ambivalent space where they feel it guarantees their being included, yet they still experience a reality of being excluded, the ambivalence of being acknowledged and paid tribute to and accepted and yet at the same time refuted and rebuffed. Feminism is not dead, but it needs to do more for increased relevance. Its place as a frame of reference, an explanatory principle and the basis of activism is not assured. It is important for Black women to develop, as Abrahams (2001) says, a sense of full individuality in a world where their experience of *self* has been over-determined by external definitions of their identity which are racist and sexist. Individual women still need to have their personal choices respected, and to have the recognition of their rights and independence respected in general society (Denfeld 1995: 2). This development of a self and of individuality is the one that the character of Gloria, in the *Scandal* episodes under discussion, struggles to attain due to Obakeng's sexist violence.

3. 3 Summary

This chapter has evaluated the bundle of theories that I have used as the interpretive lens to frame my study. These include theories of representation, online identity and feminism. In this study I evaluate how meaning about women and women's issues (in this case gender violence) is constructed in the social media context and how such

[26] One of these networks is the Women in Media Network that was specifically created to change the narrative of women in traditional and new media including social media (*Graça Machel Trust 2015 Annual Report*). The idea is that conversations that women may carry on these media platforms will help shape and define the sort of identities that women in Africa want to be associated with.

construction responds to shifting perceptions of women and femininity. Chatting on social media is an instance of cyberculture. The interest in this study goes further than just an interest in the cyberculture of social media talk, to explore the dynamics of such online interaction in relation to intimate partner violence. Where representation is concerned, the online world has been identified as a contradictory and ambivalent space in which the representation and perception of gender is fluid, and such fluidity may be positive or negative. At the same time, the ability to create multiple and fragmented identities is, for some, liberating. Whereas soap opera traditionally has been targeted at women, with prime-time television using the genre to highlight some of the social ills that affect society, television is nowadays more of a shared experience due to smart phones and tablets which enable viewers to share what they have watched on social media. This gives rise to social media, a platform of sharing views about content that audiences watch that knows neither geographical boundaries nor is necessarily bound by time.

What I am doing in this Chapter, therefore, is to describe the various framing elements of my black feminist online "anthropology", which McLaurin (2001: 1) describes as a conscious act of knowledge production and canon formation. In as far as a Black feminist online anthropology "constructs its own canon that is both theoretical and based in a politics of praxis and poetics" (McLaurin 2001: 2), this study seeks to do that with Facebook chat about intimate partner violence. All the theories combined in this chapter are merely an entry point to reflecting on and constructing theory, praxis, politics, and poetics out of social media chat on gender violence. In as far as South Africa continues to top international rankings of incidence of gender violence, this study is an intervention. It is part of what Britton (2006) calls "organising against gender violence in South Africa".

Feminist movements are credited for putting women's issues on the agenda. Feminism, as an activist movement and as a body of ideas, underlines the need for a positive transformation of society such that women are not marginalised but are treated as full citizens in all spheres of life (Mekgwe 2008:16). The women's movement was the driving force behind the wider feminist politics. However, the struggle is far from over, and the visibility cannot be taken for granted. As Hooks (2000: xiv) points out, the feminist movement has not yet created a sustained feminist revolution

because of the systemic incidence of patriarchy, sexism and oppression. In fact, Hooks notes that any feminist gains are always at risk of being undone.

This chapter thus evaluated feminism as a theoretical framework broadly but zooms in on black feminism and African feminism and also draws on strands of cyber feminism and postmodern feminism. Black feminism places black women and their experiences at the centre of analysis. Cyber feminism, for its part, is useful in a study such as mine which seeks to evaluate modes and spaces of “social media talk” which might or might not alienate women. This aspect is perhaps reflected not so much by gender affiliation but by the feminist ideas of participants. The discussion also touched on issues of masculinity and patriarchy, given how these are central in feminist discourse. Because social media is relatively new platform, and generates a diversity of discourses, and the diverse positions that may arise in social media talk about intimate partner violence, I chose a blended theoretical positioning as the most appropriate.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is the methodology chapter of the study. It shows what types of data were collected, how and why they were collected, and how they were analysed. Sampling and ethical issues are outlined, while the chapter also draws attention to the methodological challenges and opportunities encountered in the course of the study. The study sought to address the central research question: What was the nature of the talk on Facebook in reaction to the episodes of violence meted on Gloria on the soapie, S*candal*? This questioned framed the following four extended research questions:

1. What sort of meanings about gender violence were generated and circulated on *Scandal*'s Facebook page?
2. How different (or similar) is social media talk about violence against women from talk about violence against women in the real world?
3. Why were audiences talking in the way they were doing on social media about violence against women?
4. How does social media discussion alter the way discussants read the "worlds" and contexts of violence against women, if at all?

The real purpose of the chapter was really to match my theoretical stance (broadly feminist, as outlined in Chapter 3), with a flexible methodological orientation, and the broader research problem outlined in Chapter 1. The chapter completes the set of preliminary chapters, which include the background chapter (Chapter 1), Literature (Chapter 2), and Theoretical framework (Chapter 3) that set the stage for the findings and data analysis chapter. The actual data collection and data analysis draws on what I thought, on balance, were the best or at least the most appropriate ways of collecting and analysing data from a social media platform such as Facebook. In particular, the data collection methods for such a new source of data have to be regarded as a work in progress. After all, none of the methods have been trialled for longer than two

decades; the earliest social media to take well known contemporary formats come after the year 2000.

What I manage to do in this chapter (and therefore what I see as one of its major strengths), however, is not just making descriptive statements about how data was sampled, collected and analysed. Rather I attempt to give a broadly theoretical, intellectual, *reflexive*, and philosophical justification of my methodology. That is, I do not just use the chapter to answer the question "How did I conduct the study?" and "What was the study about", but also the central question of "Why did I do the research at all in the first place?" This last question necessitates at least a reflection of a philosophical, theoretical, and epistemological nature. This would be informed partly by the theoretical framework (Chapter 3), but also by the fundamental research question and research problem (Chapter 1).

As Hammersley and Atkinson, (1995: 24) point out, a "research design should be a *reflexive process* operating *through every stage* of a project" (see Fig 5). Essentially, this is a chapter containing not merely my "methodology" but also my "methodological thinking", a "methodological invitation" (to the reader) and a "methodological framework". The chapter could therefore be titled a "methodological framework" or "methodological invitation" rather than just the conventional "research methodology". Indeed, the title of "methodological framework" is more appropriate for this chapter because, while I do not neglect to outline my "methods" in a step by step way, the Chapter is really and truly a *conceptual extension* of the "Theoretical Framework" Chapter (Chapter 3) as well as a seamless flow into the "Findings and Discussion" chapter (Chapter 5) that follows. That is, the chapter offers more if it is read *reflexively* as part of this "trinity". This is more so because there is focus on giving clear methodological justification for the choice of the three-pronged aspects of the study: *Scandal*, Facebook, and intimate partner violence. Basically, I show how and why these elements – though perhaps not easily subsumable into one another – must in the end necessarily be studied *together*. What I am describing here is closer to what Maxwell (2005) has referred to as an "interactive model of research design", which shows relationships among five components shown in Figure 3 below. At the centre of the interactive – or reflexive – process are the research questions, which must always inform every move, direction, and decision.

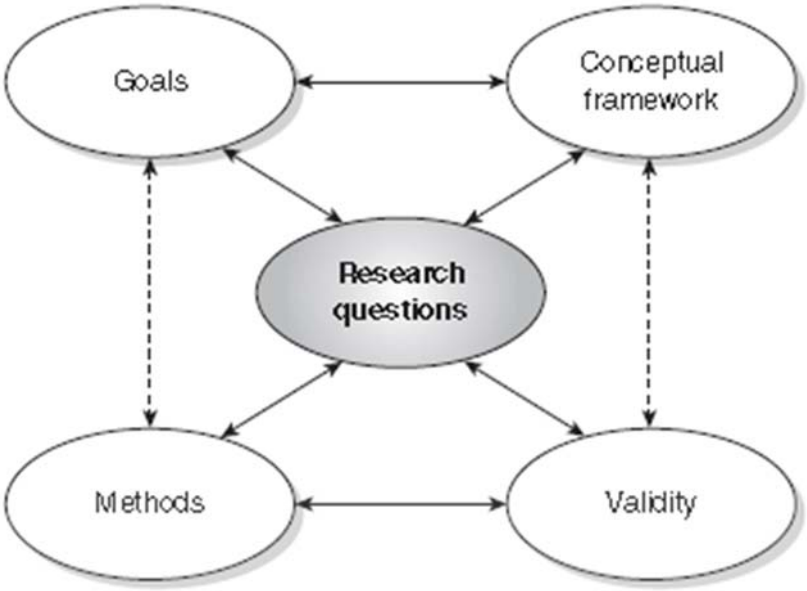


Fig 4.1: An Interactive Model of Research Design (Source: Maxwell, J.A. [2005]. Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach)

4.2 Qualitative methodology: A brief overview

Methodology is, broadly, a research strategy (Du Plooy, 2009: 21), and deals with the question of how and why to do research in a certain way (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011:117). Hence:

> Methodology connotes a set of rules and procedures to guide research and against which its claims can be evaluated. It is therefore fundamental to the construction of all forms of knowledge. While it is too simplistic to liken it to a recipe, it could be thought of as a set of guidelines that are widely known and generally adhered to. (Miller and Brewer, 2003: 192)

Methodology thus functions as a guide to what problems are worth investigating and how the research should proceed. Different methodologies are associated with different paradigms, the main ones being the quantitative and qualitative. My study is qualitative, a methodological choice that I have made because it is consequential to my feminist philosophical stance (see Chapter 3) as well as to the social science phenomenon of intimate partner violence being investigated. Whereas quantitative research uses numerical formulae to examine relationships between measurable variables (Creswell 2009: 4), qualitative research "aims to address questions

concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans' lives and social worlds".[27] The differences between qualitative and quantitative research (see Fig. 4.1) have major implications for the kind of "findings" that emerge from them, but also for the overall research design.

Qualitative "Inductive" Methods Model	Quantitative "Deductive" Methods Model
Topical area	Formulate a research question
Analyze subset of data	Develop a hypothesis
Generate codes (literal to abstract)	Define variables
Reanalyze data; analyze additional data	Construct measurement instrument
Memo notes	Coding
Analyze additional data	Sampling (random sampling)
Refine codes; generate meta-codes	Reliability and validity checks
Analyze additional data	Statistical check (if necessary)
Embodied interpretation	Calculate results
Representation	Represent results (typically on charts or graphs)

Table. 4:1 A Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Models of Research (Source: An Invitation to Qualitative Research, p.9).

Qualitative methodologies, which broadly inform five main approaches – narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (cf. Creswell 2007: 35) – are preferred over quantitative ones when numerical formulae "seem less adequate at explaining the complexity of the world, or of personal experiences" (Davis and Mosdell 2006: 3). It is difficult to study human beings or what human beings say and do as if these were statistics or specimens. Rather, human beings have agency, *praxis* and subjectivity which defies precise measurement. As such, qualitative methods "are used to obtain knowledge about the characteristics, complexities and interrelationships of phenomena, often specific human matters such as experiences, emotions, beliefs and motives" (Malterud 1993: 201).[28] I agree with

[27] Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., and Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 36:717-732.
[28] Malterud, K. (1993). Shared Understanding of the qualitative research process: Guidelines for the medical researcher. *Family Practice* 10 (2), 201-206.

the view that our worlds are shaped more by the subjective and reflexive than by invariant, static structures. It is this reason, for instance, that made me find value in postmodern feminism and its anti-structural "anti-foundationalism".

Some scholars argue that, compared to quantitative research, qualitative research "struggles for legitimacy" (Miller and Brewer 2003: 239). This is because the focus on qualitative research's "social meanings" may be seen as "less reliable than numerate data" and so-called "hard facts". Numbers appear to have status and authority that "meanings" do not have. Indeed, meanings may appear ephemeral and elusive. The charge of relativism has also been laid against the qualitative paradigm by its critics – since it seems all we can discover is an *interpretation* and since it seems that "anything goes" (the chapters "Paradigmatic Controversies"[29] and "Competing paradigms in qualitative research"[30]). For instance, Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961: 17) strangely describe their study as having "no design", that it "had no well-worked-out set of hypotheses to be tested, no data-gathering instruments purposely designed to secure information relevant to these hypotheses, no set of analytic procedures specified in advance." It is such statements that get critics to claim that qualitative studies are not really "science". But, if all that we can uncover and discover in this study, for instance, is an (feminist) *interpretation*, and never what things *really are* – empirically – in relation to gender violence, what then is the point of the study? If the critics are right, it would seem that, ultimately, qualitative methodologies do not allow us to make any large empirical claims.

However, despite these doubts, qualitative research is a really important paradigm "premised on important philosophical ideas concerning human nature, society and the nature of knowledge" (Miller and Brewer 2003: 239). While it does have limits, I do believe that comparing qualitative and quantitative methods is the wrong way of going about it. I do not believe it is a question of arguing that qualitative research provides better answers than quantitative methods. The two are hardly comparable. I concede that qualitative methods are never going to be the most preferable when it comes to

[29] Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba E.G. (2000). "Paradigmatic Controversies". In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd Edition, (pp. 164-188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
[30] Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). "Competing paradigms in qualitative research". In: N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 1st Edition, (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

prediction, reliability, validity, or replication. But the charge that in qualitative methods "anything goes" (since everything is apparently a construction), or that such methods are inherently incoherent, is manifestly untrue. What qualitative methods offer is a different – even *unique* – way of seeing, and reflecting about, the world. They address concerns from an entirely different perspective. I prefer the perspective that says that life is not like a game of chess. Rather, beyond schemas and formulas, things are complex and complicated. There is life beyond numbers and computations.

4.2 Data Collection: Netnography

When it comes to studying what people say online, there are broadly two schools of thought. On the one hand are those who believe in the efficacy of tried and tested methods and thus insist that there is no need for new methodological inventions. Put prosaically, this school would say that there is nothing new under the sun. On the other hand, are those who insist that a whole set of new methods are required. Put prosaically, this school would say that things are always changing, and the only constant is change. Key to the split between these two schools of thought are questions such as: why adopt a new approach? What can a new way of doing things achieve that other, more established methods cannot? The first school of thought maintains that traditional methods are adaptable and flexible enough to meet the demands of studying *internet sociality* (Mare and Stremlau 2017). The claim is that, as long as the Internet is strongly embedded in people's everyday lives and not radically divorced from offline activities, traditional data collection methods can be easily imported, remediated, and digitalised (Mosca 2014). Others are of the opinion that "virtual ethnographies are *just* ethnographies" (and therefore "do not require radically new methods" (Mare and Stremlau 2017).

The second school of thought, for its part, does not just recommend the re-sharpening of existing research methods to fit new research environments, but plead that we recognise that ICTs fundamentally challenge existing research assumptions and premises (Howard, 2002; Murthy, 2008; Kozinets 2015). That is, it is not enough to rely on, and simply import, the old. Rather, we must innovate and build new methods and instruments of data collection and data analysis. Kozinets argues that when an approach is significantly different from existing approaches it gains a new name and necessarily becomes a field, discipline or school in and of itself. At least, this is how

netnography – the methodology chosen for this study – came about (Kozinets 2015: 5).

When I look at the two schools of thoughts, I see a middle point existing. The school of thought that prefers the efficacy of old methods is correct in the sense that the world of methodologies is never a *tabula rasa*. The structure of methodologies is always already *inscribed*. The so-called "new" methods, as such, will always have some degree of foundation in the old. This is obvious in the name "netnography", for instance, which combines the "net" and "ethnography". It is therefore true that there is nothing new under the sun. At the same time, the school of thought that prefers new methods is right because the old methods cannot take undue comfort in the permanence or immutable efficaciousness of their instruments. We have moved, for instance, from analogue to digital in less than half a century, change so total that the millennial generation has little or no appreciation of analogue. Many digitally connected millennials, for instance, cannot imagine a world without social media or search engines. I can go as far as saying that social media, as a *signifying practice*, can stand on its own *apart* from how we talk and socialise in the "real world" – both in a positive and negative way. Social media talk may not be a mere reflection of an already existing lived, social reality (reality "out there"), but rather constitutes an authentic new layer of reality that is available (only) once someone is *logged on* and *signed in* into Facebook.

If we want to believe that *new forms of identity* are possible on, and because of, social media, and indeed are being asserted and negotiated on social media, then perhaps *social media talk* cannot ground itself in anything other than social media. There is a binarity created here between the real world out there (let us call it the "outside") and the world that is available only if one is logged in (let us call it the "inside"). The binarity of "inside" and "outside" may mean that we are called upon to respond *uniquely* to the ways in which social media functions as a signifying practice. We must not look too much for answers *externally*. Rather, the answers about how people talk and why they talk the way they do, are *there* on Facebook. The "language" of Facebook is a system of Facebook-based signs and signifiers, located on the "inside" of Facebook, each of which acquires its identity in relation to the identity of other Facebook-based signs and signifiers – such that *social media talk* comes into existence largely (perhaps

exclusively?) through *signification*. We must learn, ontologically, to *be* on Facebook (to be on the "inside"), and internalise what it means to *be* on Facebook, even if Facebook is not a "real" place. We must learn ways of being "inside" Facebook, even as we also exist out there in the real world (being on the "outside").

The discourse of "outside" and "inside" is inherently about the nature of meaning, which we know qualitative research is best at uncovering. By talking about "outside" and "inside", we are also initiating an examination into the ontology of Facebook. Is Facebook a real place? Is it a placeless place? Are there real people on Facebook? Is the subject on Facebook (the subject on the "inside") the same subject on the "outside" (in the real-world out there)? Is the Facebook "friend" even a subject or merely one of many dispersed subjectivities? How should we treat what an avatar says? Should we treat it as proper discourse? Such questions are complicated by algorithms and bots that are machines that can themselves organise and generate forms of "talk" that seems as good, if not better, than that of "real" human beings. Ultimately, what we are interrogating here is the validity of studying Facebook comments, and whether it amounts to anything. At the one end the issue is about qualitative methods and how much science they contain, and if we can reliably learn anything about society from them. At the other end is the theme of gender violence itself, and what (or whether) we can learn about it from simply scrolling up and down on a social media platform.

We know for instance, that being a "friend" on Facebook (on the "inside"), for instance, is not the same as being friends in the real world (on the "outside"). Being friends in the real world (i.e. on the "outside") requires a *different type* and *different amount* of commitment that is not possible on social media (on the "inside'). A hashtag is not action, perhaps because it is all on the "inside". We saw with the #BringBackOurGirls movement, for instance, that those who wanted the girls to be brought back would not have recognised any of the Chibok girls even if they had met them on the street (the typical criticism of Clicktivism and "keyboard warriors"). Just because we say so on social media does not necessarily make things so. The universe has not really changed; only our hashtags have proliferated and trended. "Liking" something on Facebook is not the same as liking something in the real world, partly because

Facebook does not offer the option of “disliking” things, but also because liking something in the real world takes a lot more than just an emoticon or emoji.

Just because someone says something negative or positive about Gloria or Obakeng on Facebook does not mean that the same person may, in the real world, be saying the same things or holding the same opinions. Ultimately, identities are grounded in social practice, not on hashtags or emojis. As Sayyid and Zac (1998: 255) point out, the labels that we use to understand reality are not the labels of reality itself. Because of the inevitable distance that exists between “outside” and “inside”, it seems that all we can uncover through *social media talk* is an *interpretation* of, as Sayyid and Zac (1998: 265) would put it, “the way a specific discourse is constructed: how identities are constituted, how narratives are articulated, and how the ensemble of narratives is rendered coherent.” We can never proceed to an experience or even a knowledge of how gender violence really is like on the “outside” (in the real world out there), make empirical claims about gender violence, or claim access to the authentic feelings and inner thoughts of those posting things on Facebook.

At the same time that we dismiss the possibility of finding any “outside” (the real world) in the “inside” (Facebook), it is important to recognise that people are inherently unique and different, and thus the reasons they say what they say and how they say what they say can never be rendered completely transparent – even if these things are expressed on the self-same platform. Just because people say things *on* Facebook does not make interpretation suddenly effortless. Just because people say things on Facebook does not make such talk homogenous or monolithic. There is still room to discover complexity on social media. Indeed, this is the rationale and justification behind conducting this study. Even as we concede that identities are grounded in social practice, and not on hashtags or emojis, I still believe that there is a lot more than meets the eye on social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and so on – in terms of richness, complexity and “thick descriptions” of human behaviours.

Basically, treating “social media talk” as *signifying practice* means that whatever data we mine from Facebook is richer and far more complex than it would if we had treated social media as a mere mechanical medium containing strings of letters, words, and statements. Hence, social media talk, even if grounded only on social media, does not

permit us to impose uniformity on what people say, even if people are saying what they are saying on the *very same platform* (in this case, Facebook) and using the very same tools. “Social depth” might not be what Zuckerberg’s soulless algorithms built into social media, but wherever people congregate and *talk*, there always is *signification*.

It is thus the crucial element of *signification* that not only unites the “inside” and “outside” but brings *social depth* to what seem to be the chaotic threads of Facebook of comments. Such *social depth* was never originally there, is not always there, is by no means automatic, and is not inevitably there. This is where the power of qualitative methods comes into its own, because it always leaves room for human subjectivities and agency. As noted earlier, human beings are not just statistics, schemas, numerical formulae or lab specimens. Social media talk is still about *humans talking*, not some social media specimens. This is the important sense in which this study expects to use a study of Facebook comments to excavate meanings about gender violence. I still want to come away with, to recover and to fulfil, a distinct sense *politics* from my study of social media.

As Kozinets (2010: 8; see also Kozinets 2015: 92) says, netnography not only helps give the researcher a cultural understanding of human experiences, drawn from online social integration and content, but also an understanding of a “hidden world” that may not seem to be there at face value. In as far as the research question is concerned, my study would have succeeded if it can make visible the links between representation (*Scandal*), subjectivity (audience talk about *Scandal*), and politics (my critique of the gender violence). The success of my study, whether or not it is framed as a political project, is not minimised by the fact that I scraped my “data” from Facebook instead of interviewing “real” South African women who experience intimate partner violence. If anything, my study might benefit from the uniqueness of such data.

Basically, the discursive approach that gives us social media talk as a unit of study and a unit analysis ensures that we are still preoccupied with “weighty”, political themes such as gender violence. They do not go away just because we are studying social media. (Indeed, when I have told people that I am doing a PhD on social media, I have sometimes been met with looks of incredulity that suggested: what is there to

study about social media?). We are not just describing strings of text or comments. Rather, the interpretive plane of *signification* has introduced a new dimension: it means that "outside" and "inside" are no longer completely separate. The sharp distinction and a priori separation between them has fallen away. Instead, in place of that split, one can start to talk about) i) *Scandal*, on the one hand, and ii) Facebook comments, on the other hand, as if one were also talking about iii) gender violence in South Africa. Basically, these three – without ever being completely subsumable into one another – turn out to be legitimate and authentic i) bodies (or forms) of knowledge, ii) discursive formations, iii) practices of articulation, and iv) interpretive terrains. Studying these three elements together opens up the way to the understanding of the social practices and power relations that explain and express gender violence. Indeed, not only has the sharp distinction and a priori separation between "inside" and "outside" fallen away, but one of the methodological condition that produces them (the one between qualitative and quantitative) no longer holds. If Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 107) are correct, then there is no necessary ontological difference between "the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice".

In fact, even if *Scandal* were a "mere" soap opera and Facebook a "mere" social media platform (and thus both heavily immersed in the politics of representation which maintains a distinction between signifier and signified), the discursive approach to *social media talk* allows us to focus on the way in which particular Facebook communities construct their forms of talk; their relationship to what they watch and enjoy watching; and their perspectives on the representation of intimate partner violence and gender violence. On the one hand, I am interested in how this community of talk is produced (and therefore in its discursive identity), but, on the other hand, I am interested in what this very discursive "construction" of this community of *Scandal* audiences has to say about perceptions about gender violence in the "real world". What we have achieved here is a degree of transcendence of the narrow limits of "outside" and "inside". Hence, the notion of *social media talk* is in the final analysis merely the first step in a broadly feminist critique of i) the representation of gender violence, ii) perceptions of gender violence, and iii) gender violence itself. In the end, the whole notion of *social media talk* is always already *political*. Each comment, and parts of each comment, express *subjectivities* and *signifying practices* that not only

enliven our study of gender violence but give it methodological, intellectual, theoretical and political significance.

I believe that the method that this study adopts, netnography (also known as virtual ethnography) – portmanteau of "net" (that is, internet) and "ethnography" – is actually not that new or that old. It is, rather, the middle of the road between the view that there is nothing new under the sun and that the only constant is change. That is, I see in the method a lot of reinterpretation as well as a lot of rewriting. What emerges is a new method that also bears a firm affinity to the old – or at least a new method in which the old is recognisable. There are necessary and permanent elements, as well as others that are contingent and changeable. It is also not difficult to notice that the so-called "online" and "offline" have more or less merged and become virtually unrecognisable. Partly, the issue boils down to whether we can, and how far we can, *step outside* Facebook in order to see the world from a non-social media point of view, and vice versa. My reading of these two schools of thought mirrors my topic itself: social media "talk".

The notion of "talk" is predicated on the "old", which is a reference to traditional – or offline – modes of discourse (see Chapter 1 and 2) but has been so diffracted by the "new" of online platforms that it is scarcely recognisable as "talk". All this is captured in the phrase (see Chapter 1) that defines social media as "high octane word of mouth". Traditional discourse could never be "high octane". At the same time, social media may get as "high octane" as it likes, but it is still people "chatting"; it is still word of mouth. In approaching "social media talk", I have little interest in distinguishing between categories in terms of their division into "old" and "new", or necessary and contingent, but, rather, according to the amount of explanatory power they bring to my study. The methods patterned according to old forms of "talk" (mirrored in ethnography), and those patterned according to new forms of "talk" (mirrored in the social media) are all, to varying degrees, present in netnography. Just like in my Theoretical Framework, where I preferred a "blended approach", I am, in my Methodology chapter, advancing a "blended method". That is, I believe that netnography is a blended method.

Here we briefly define “ethnography”, not because we are doing ethnography per se (at least not in the normative sense), but because it is part of the “old” that informs the “new”. That is, we want to have an idea of how the “old” informs the “new”, if at all. As Kozinets (2015: 54) points out, ethnography is a “direct historical predecessor” and “source of the core practices of netnography”. At the outset, however, it is important to state that the relationship between the two – whether direct or not – is governed by a constant tension not dissimilar to the one that we described previously as “inside” and “outside”. Those who do traditional ethnography necessarily venture into the world “out there” (the “outside”), while the netnographers only travel virtually, with their bums on seats (the “inside”). The extent to which netnographers really do “proper” ethnography is thus at the centre of the tension. At the same time, the old image of ethnography as an immersive practice appeals to the netnographers and is important in their self-image. However, the younger counterpart remains less known and less well defined compared to its older uncle, ethnography. At the same time, the likes of van Maanen (1988) in Kozinets (2010:163) and Rogers (2009) have argued that there is no such thing as pure ethnography. That is there is no iron curtain or monopoly built around traditional ethnography that disqualifies applying this term to online methods, whatever the names that are preferred.

Ethnography has been described as a “systematic description of human behaviour and organisational culture based on first hand observation” (Howard 2002: 553). At base, ethnography is interested in researching about cultural sites or artefacts. Ethnographers more or less “live” with the researched participants (in as far as a researcher can be said to “live”) in order to experience their environment “first-hand” in what Malinowski describes as realising their “vision of the world” (Malinowski 1922: 25). Ethnography, its practitioners say, endeavours to investigate participants’ perspectives, the nature and forms of their knowledge, their interactions, practices and discourses aiming to draw connections between practices, experiences and the context (Lüders 2004: 225). In traditional ethnography, the ethnographer travels physically to a field site and stays there for an extended period of time in order to participate in research. As Creswell (2007:71) points out, “gathering the types of information typically needed in an ethnography involves going to the research site”. This “going there” and “staying there” (for the duration of the data collection) is necessary for ethnography – otherwise it would *not* be ethnography.

Ethnography is important to netnography apparently because, as Hine (2008:922) observes, the internet – which social media is a part of – is recognised as "both a cultural context and a cultural artefact". This means that virtual ethnographers necessarily spend or "live" part of their lives on the Internet, something which they need to do if they need "to keep up-to-date with, and participating and collaborating in, online discussions" (Postill and Pink, 2012:6). Unlike traditional ethnography, which we have said involves the ethnographer travelling physically to a field site, virtual ethnographers follow and observe only "internet events" (Hine, 2005:239). This suggests that the ethnographic content of netnography is rather thin. However, there are deeper commonalities. Virtual ethnographers, like their traditional counterparts, *immerse* themselves in culture and communities they are studying.

Immersion, it appears, is important for the internet denizens too. Immersion for sustained periods of time offers one way of dealing with the "'silence' of the social" (Hirschauer 2006: 414), and allows digging deep into people's everyday life contexts, what Malinowski (1922: 18) calls "the *imponderabilia* of everyday life". Like its traditional counterpart (but also in its own way), netnography (or virtual ethnography) also "gets under the surface, sees what is invisible and shows what is unspoken" (Pink, 2008). Kozinets (2010: 87) argues that a netnographer should experience the online social interaction in the same way the participants do. However, one does their ethnography, they must somehow "immerse" themselves and feel that they have gained a "deep understanding" of what is going on. Such immersion, of course, is important in qualitative research *in general*. It is not exclusive to either ethnography or netnography. Meriam (2000: 28), for instance, notes that "immersing" or becoming "intimate" within a given social setting for a lengthy period of time enables a researcher to obtain deep insights of the situation being studied and establish meaning (see also Denzin 2009: 85).

Because it is relatively new, and the field crowded, netnography – a fairly a new tool of research, developed in the mid-1990's, following the emergence of the nascent field of online research pioneered by Nancy Baym in the early 1990s (Hine 2008: 922) – necessarily competes with terms such as virtual ethnography, digital ethnography, ethnography of the Internet, connective ethnography, networked ethnography,

cyberethnography, digital anthropology, social media ethnography, and so on. As part of the early online research, Baym (2000) analysed online postings commenting on soap operas and used a combination of the survey and participant observation to gather data and a coding process to analyse data collected. Another early online researcher, Tulloch (2000), employed interviews to collect data from fans of a soap opera and audience case studies of various television genres including soap operas, current affairs and documentaries.

Kozinets (2010; 2015) who coined the term "netnography" and developed the framework, links its rise to the emergence of new media. For him netnography is more of an approach to guide analysis and understanding than a strictly bound set of principles and practices (Kozinets 2015: 54). Funnelling out from a rigorous research question and research design, Kozinets (2010: 8) notes, netnography is best at engaging "groupings, gatherings or collections of people" involved in online discussions or communications. These discussions or communications have to take place "long enough", a statement that reflects a preoccupation with immersive practices. Data collected may be rich or thin, protected or given freely, produced by a person or group (Kozinets 2010: 75).

The only reason netnography seems seminal compared to the others that belong within the same crowded field is, firstly, the sustained way in which Kozinets (2010; 2015) has written extensively about it and developed a clear methodological framework around it and, secondly, the way he has regarded it as "a new mapping of reality". That is, netnography is not just an addendum to ethnography, but has its own methodological identity and methodological clarity. Hence:

> What distinguishes netnography from all other methods is two matters. First an axiology – the purpose is to explore, reveal and understand human realities and social worlds as they change in a coevolutionary process with techno culture. Second is a central source of data. Netnography focuses primary on the artifactual and communicative realities of online social exchange. Within these bounds many paths and forms of understanding are usefully employed, centering upon but not limited to participant observational techniques (Kozinets 2015: 52).

The “proliferated set of terms and practices itself”, argues Kozinets (Kozinets 2015: 52), “is evidence (that) new adaptations are needed to differential online ethnography from its face-to-face predecessor”. Indeed, Kozinets (2010:65) regards netnography as “entirely appropriate, exhaustive, and complete within itself”, so much so that he labels the idea of combining online and offline as “nonsensical”. For instance, whereas some online and social media researchers combine virtual ethnography with traditional methods of data collection such as surveys and interviews (Villi and Matikainen 2016), netnography is able to stand on its own. There is enough data on the internet to make the combination of online and traditional data collection superfluous.

The logic used for combining data obtained online with that gathered from interviews or surveys in virtual ethnography is that gaining access to audiences helps us to understand more of our histories, identities and emotions. But there is predictable controversy around that. Kozinets (2010: 65) basically dismisses virtual ethnography as not *pure* online research if it fails to utilise data generated online *exclusively*. Not only does Kozinets insist that we can only usefully employ netnography as a stand-alone (Kozinets 2015: 82), but he reckons that combining purely online research with traditional face-to-face interviews turns it into something else, what he calls *blended netnography*. It was important for Kozinets, at the outset, to assess whether *online sociality* is different enough to warrant “a new mapping of reality”. He decided that, although ethnography remains a “direct historical predecessor” and “source of the core practices of netnography”, the scope of online sociality represented and required “a new mapping of reality”. My reading of Kozinets’ oeuvre, of course, is that the quest for a clear and systematic methodological identity is still a work in progress. What he has achieved to date, however, is a usable methodology that *can* stand alone in some respects.

The limitations of netnography show when it comes to the consideration of the choices, options and room left open for individual researchers to tinker with it. Nimrod (2011), who used netnography to explore the “fun culture” in seniors’ online communities, and uncovered that “fun culture” offers participants a number of desired benefits such as meaningful play and a space to “practise and demonstrate their abilities and means for coping with age” thereby offering an opportunity to improve their “wellbeing and successful ageing”, prefers that netnography were less prescriptive, with some of the

methodological specifics left to the individual researcher as is the norm with all qualitative research. Kozinets, however, seems to prefer the prescriptive route. For instance, he does not regard anyone who dispenses with strict online participatory observation as doing normative netnography. He rejects the notion of the non-participatory observer because to him the process then loses the whole essence of an ethnography which netnography is modelled around (Kozinets 2010: 74). His argument is that when one is purely observing and not participating, they miss the whole process of cultural understanding and interpretation becomes "impaired" "flat" and "simplistic" (Kozinets 2010:77). However, it is not clear to what extent we can define "online participation" and "online participation-observation" *prescriptively*. I am persuaded, for instance, that Facebook is unique in that the act of "Liking" is an activity that qualifies one to be a participant observer even when they do not participate in the conversations.

In this study I participated and observed as a "lurker": an unobtrusive fly on the wall. Hine (2003: 160) describes a *lurker* as one who only observes the online communication but does not take an active part in it. Nimrod (2011) calls this "purely observational". For Gummesson (2000), lurking would equate to a kind of "mental access" wherein one gains an 'intimate familiarity' of the research site. I gained entry to the research site through "liking" the *Scandal* Facebook page, an act which afforded me the privilege of viewing and reading the relevant Facebook postings since I was already a participant (not just a researcher or observer). Structurally, the mere act of "liking" an open "Friends of…" Facebook page "qualifies" one to be a participant. That is, the process of "Liking" or "Friending" automatically enables a researcher to become a participant and to see Facebook posts by others. Commenting, liking and friending are built-in ways for Facebook "friends" to interact with content posted (Abram and Pearlman 2010: 118). At any rate, this was the only way to get "gate pass" access to comments that were being posted.

4.2.1 Ethics

What troubled me about this mode of *entree*, ethically, was that the mere act of "liking" the page gave me unfettered permission to view comments without need of producing a gatekeeper letter or a consent form. That is, I was able to read comments just from "liking" the Facebook page, but without having been given any other form of formal

permission to do so. All said, it was too easy gaining access. I could “come and go” as I pleased, without having to re-negotiate access over and over again. No one asked any questions: all I needed was a “like” – a mere click of a button. Complicating matters is the fact that there was no one to ask for permission to read the comments because there was no permission process. There was also no way to ask individual users or groups of users for permission. It occurred to me that it would also have seemed weird to ask for permission from individuals to read their Facebook comments in an “open” group. Finally, asking for permission is contrary to the profile of a “lurking researcher”. As noted, a lurker is like a fly on the wall.

Ethics in the online space, as Kozinets (2015: 130) suggests, are something of a “moving target”. What constitutes ethical online research such as netnography remains a matter of debate. Because many assume that social media data is already in the public domain, there is no need to seek permission for using it for research purposes (Zimmer 2010). But there are clear ethical issues at play. For instance, all data used on Facebook is traceable, and leaves a digital footprint (Jungher 2015). People’s privacy can thus be violated, if one wanted. Kozinets (2015:134) has drawn a checklist of ethical questions relevant to netnography:

1. Are online social interactions private or public?
2. What roles do corporations like Facebook play in our research? Do they have a say in what is ethical, legal or moral?
3. Whose consent do we need to gain in netnography?
4. How do we gain the informed consent of the online other?
5. Who actually owns the online data posted on social networking sites?
6. How do we deal with the information on corporate websites and other online forums? Can we use it in our research?
7. Should we use conversations that we participate in or “overhear” in chat rooms? Are there different ethical rules for different types and sites of online media?
8. Do age and vulnerability matter online? In media in which identity is difficult to verify, how can we be sure about the age or vulnerability of research participants?
9. Do international boundaries influence the way a netnographer collects data and publishes research?

The University of Johannesburg's Higher Degrees Committees, whether at departmental, School, Faculty or Senate level, do not seem adequately equipped to review online research techniques such as netnography. They typically treat online research as not needing stringent ethical clearance since one will only be dealing with words and text, and since platforms such as Facebook are already "public". But the gathering of data from social media and other online spaces is a growing minefield (cf. Buchanan 2003; Zimmer 2010; Whiteman 2012). At least, it is not as simple as generally assumed. Online research has not freed us from needing to observe stringent and rigorous standards. Far from it. In my view, the need for ethical probity has become even more urgent, since there are so many unknowns in this area. At any rate, in the absence of a clear UJ ethical code regarding online research, it was left to me to explore ethical regimes and standards that work. For instance, I made sure I anonymised data. This entailed doing what Mare and Streamlau (2017) term to "de-identify" the data, meaning that all googleable postings were paraphrased. Throughout, no one was quoted by name. I also sought consent to use and publish the data from the administrators of the "Friends of *Scandal*" Facebook page, despite the fact that the page is open and public. That is, the page allows *anyone* to join, share, leave, and invite others to join. As pointed out, information on groups like this can be viewed by anyone, like me, who has liked the page.

At any rate, after lurking for some time, researchers may decide on different degrees of being participant observers. The benefit of being a lurker is that it ensures that the dynamics and behaviors in the examined online communities are not influenced by the researcher's presence (Dholakia and Zhang, 2004). This need to be a lurking or silent observer, of course, militates against intervening in order to ask for permission. As already noted, asking for permission to read comments does not seem usual for already-open, already-public Facebook groups. Merriam (2009:119) describes the observation method as "trustworthy" because the researcher sees things first hand and may notice things that have become obvious to participants. In this study, lurking and seeing things "from a distance" (that is, without necessarily being part of the conversation) enabled me to observe "naturally occurring" discourse without "interference". The disadvantage of being "inside", of course, is that one is not able to read non-verbal communication. However, do we really need to if we are online?

Should cues such as smileys and emojis not be counted as adequate in evaluating the mood of a person? Kozinets (2010:74), in his usual prescriptive way, is of course decidedly wary about endorsing data obtained from online by lurkers, suggesting it results in "superficial" and "flat" analysis. However, as I pointed out earlier, the definition of "online participation" and the boundary between lurkers and committed participants is never clear. I believe I lurked long enough not only to be well informed about what was going on with the "talk" but also to count as a "participant observer" in the true netnographic sense.

Creswell (2007: 125) defines purposive sampling as when the investigator wants "to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample *from which the most can be learned*". Patton (2002:230) sees the significance of purposive sampling as lying in "selecting *information-rich* cases". I focused data collection on Facebook comments relating to six (6) purposively sampled episodes (2129, 2146, 2153, 2162, 2164, 2186) depicting intimate partner violence perpetrated against the character of Gloria, by her second husband, Obakeng. These episodes were shown between 17 November 2014 and February 04, 2015. I drew my data from the "Friends" of e-tv's *Scandal* Facebook page who liked and posted comments, pictures, and videos relating to these episodes. As noted, I gained entry to the research site through liking the *Scandal* Facebook page. This gave me researcher-privilege to view and read relevant Facebook postings.

Since it is regarded as critical to spend time with the people being studied in order to become "part of the natural surrounding" (O'reilly 2005:13), I built what I considered to be sufficient familiarity with the Facebook page and its "dynamics" over a period of several weeks. This included observing who commented, how they commented, what they said, who commented most, and who commented least. This was my way of experiencing what the research subjects experienced and understanding them better (O'reilly 2005: 14). I also, in addition to being a lurker, watched and re-watched the six domestic violence episodes, in order to familiarise myself with the whole action. This allowed me to be able to follow the commentary on Facebook without getting lost. In this way, I became an "insider" of sorts, and to be "in the know". To be honest, however, it did not seem to me that much empathy is required during netnography (at least, the kind of netnography I conducted) for two reasons. Firstly, because one

cannot really see “real” people once one is “inside” virtual worlds. Secondly, the fact that I did not need gate keeper access or consent forms meant that there was no requirement to know anyone better. That is, there would be no penalties for me as a researcher.

4.3 Data collection

After this period of brief “familiarity”, “data collection” began in earnest. I would surf manually for “old” (archival) data (text, images, videos, audio) and “new” data relating to the six *Scandal* episodes. I regularly checked this “Friends of *Scandal*” Facebook page for updates, new commentary, pictures, and videos relevant to the six episodes. I was able to manually scan and search for all the unfiltered top comments. I also scanned through the posts for replies to original posts. If a post was shared, I would check if the shared posts got responses, including responses to responses. Essentially, I would scan the whole thread if need be. I mined, scrapped and extracted the relevant posts either through screenshotting the posts, saving as PDF, or through copy and pasting into Microsoft word. How data is mined affects the quality of analysis (Kozinets 2015). For larger, longitudinal studies, with large amounts of data, it is certainly necessary to use automation. I purposely kept my study small scale, with a focus on just those 6 episodes. Also, I did not use expensive data mining software simply because I could not afford it. Therefore, data was extracted through what (Kozinets 2015:198) describes as data mining using “natural” methods.

Eventually, it took me six months to capture all the data I needed. All in all, I collected approximately 177 pages worth of comments and visuals relating to the six episodes, by dozens of participants and message threads. I would say that this amount of data was evidence of my own “immersion” in the topic. I kept the posts I collected in carefully marked folders on my computer for each episode. For each entry in each folder, I marked or named it according to a specific original response to an episode. It was important to archive the comments as soon as they were posted, in case the posts were removed from the page. It was also necessary for ease of reference and coding. I would re-read the threads in convenient settings as and when I needed to, without needing to activate mobile data or Wi-Fi to go online. Through watching and re-watching the six episodes, I gained sufficient insight and deep understanding of the episodes that instigated the talk.

As noted in Fig 5 earlier, I kept the core research questions of my study in mind while archiving and coding the posts. I regarded the posts as "ethnographic" responses (Du Plooy 2009:167) which I would draw on later at the analysis stage in order to understand human communication via perceptions, ideologies, knowledge, and attitudes. As far as "inside" is concerned, the online scenarios counted as "natural situations". Basically, nothing in the nature of data scraped from Facebook threads militates against drawing from such data as part of a study that could lead to social justice interventions, edutainment or "heightening awareness" (Barritt in Creswell, 2007: 102). My study, like any other, could therefore lead to a "better understanding" of society, gendered attitudes, and "improvements in practice". Such data could further assist into "fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking".

4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a combination of thematic and a loose form of discourse-theoretical approach (Sayyid and Zac 1998: 249), filtered through the interpretive lens of netnography and the blended feminist theoretical standpoint discussed in Chapter 3. Nimrod (2011) advises that when using netnography data collection and analysis should continue as long as it generates new insights (that is, until saturation), when no new insights are being yielded. Denzin (1989: 83) emphasises the need of finding a starting point in data analysis that offers a "thick description" (after Geertz) that presents detail, context, emotion and webs of social relationships where "the voices, feelings, action and meanings of interacting individuals are heard". Description, as Wolcott (1990: 28) notes, is "the foundation upon which qualitative research is built".

Through thematic analysis I captured emerging themes through codes and patterns in the comments and posts relating to the six episodes, which also required me to examine the nature of the language used and how it was used. A theme, defined as a repeating idea that is related to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2006: 82), captures something important about the data in relation to the research question. I drew on themes that I felt were distinctly linked to the kind of "talk" that I was investigating, primarily in order to derive a range of preliminary meanings from the data. Kozinets (2015:212) advises on having a "coding question" to guide the coding exercise. For example, the researcher in this study asked: what salient thematic

patterns appear in this or that Facebook conversation? To guide me in preparing these coding questions, I would “wear” my “feminist lens”.

Netnography, says Kozinets 2015: 88), can be used to “reveal discourse about hidden and stigmatic behaviours”. I regarded whatever was posted by individuals on Facebook about Gloria and Obakeng as constituting “talk”, whether it was a word, words, series of letters, punctuation marks, an emoticon, or emoji. At the same time, individuals are unique, so it was not just the description of what they said and how they said it that I was interested in. Rather, I was also interested in theorising what lurked being what they said. This is where feminist theory helped to *interpret* whatever was being uttered. At the same time, it is important to recognise that people are unique, and thus the reasons they say what they say and how they say what they say can never be completely transparent. Just because people say things on Facebook does not make interpretation easy, whether we use a feminist lens or not. The point is that it is not useful to impose uniformity on what people say, even if people are saying what they are saying on the *same platform*, Facebook, and using the same tools. My use of feminism as an interpretive lens, therefore, is not meant to impose a uniform either interpretation on social media talk in general, social media talk about gender violence, or social media talk specific to the Gloria/Obakeng episodes from *Scandal*.

Here I wish to maintain, as with Sayyid and Zac (1998: 249), that reality is accessible through the descriptions made *in* language. Descriptions, through language, have an important influence on how we understand and interpret reality. That is, descriptions of the world are the means by which we socially construct reality. As Sayyid and Zac (1998: 255) argue, observe “descriptions of the world are our handles upon it.” As earlier noted, the labels that we use to understand reality are not the labels of reality itself. However, just because someone says something negative or positive about Gloria on Facebook does not mean that the same person may, in the real world, be saying the same things or holding the same opinions. Social media is important to us because it inserts things into social discourse, in a hyper-mediated way that is unlike anything we have known prior to the 2000s. I am not quite sure that it does change the things themselves (such as intimate partner violence), at least not directly. As a high octane word of mouth, social media is first and foremost a mode of

communication. Whether or not people change their behaviour requires other variables to change as well, not just communication. But how and what we communicate is an important and invaluable starting point.

The six steps of data analysis (Braun and Clark 2006:82) were helpful in structuring the whole data analysis process. Essentially, I incorporated elements of familiarisation, immersion, reading and re-reading (and making notes) during the early phase of data collection. After I had collected 177 pages of posts I then cleaned the data and started developing codes to identify important features and themes in the data set, and to examine the codes to identify broader patterns of meaning. This part also included what Kozinets (2015:198) calls *abduction* (fitting things together using the basic concepts that are emerging) and *visual abstraction* (taking small things and trying to see the "large", "universal" and "general").

Following this I reviewed the codes and themes, setting aside the ones not properly supported or splitting some if this was necessary. The next step was to define and name the themes, in order to start "creating a story" out of the identified themes. Here I also applied what Kozinets calls *cultural decoding* (assembling a significant amount of diverse data and fitting it together using cultural categories), an example of which would be decoding how much to read into the so-called culture of violence against women in South Africa and linking it to patriarchy and masculinity. Finally, I related the themes to the research questions, filtered through the feminist theoretical framework and the literature from Chapter 2. Basically, the whole process of analysis included highlighting and displaying findings and interpreting them, describing patterns and contextualising information within a broader analytic framework.

4.5 Summary

The chapter gave an overview of the qualitative methodology used in the study to frame the processes of collecting, sampling and analysing data. If research is "a systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process" (Meriam 2000: 4), then methodologies are as important as telescopes, magnifying glasses, x-ray machines and other tools that allow us to deepen our gaze and to see deeper. The chapter considered the problem of "inside" and "outside" and drew on it in the assessment of the importance of treating social

media talk as a *signifying practice*. The method of netnography used to gather data, was discussed in some detail, as was thematic analysis and the discourse-theoretical approach, used to analyse data. The chapter also examined ethical questions encountered in the process of collecting and analysing data. The next Chapter discusses findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

This study is about what we can learn from studying *how* society *talks* about battered women. In this regard, this chapter presents findings and analysis on the phenomenon of *social media talk* in relation to regimes of representation of gender violence. Woodward (2002: 74) tells us that sites and systems of representation help us to "make sense of both ourselves and of others" and are "crucial to the marking of both difference and sameness". This chapter is, by some margin, the most important chapter of the study, because it presents my own original insights into the topic being investigated. The original contribution to knowledge is more or less contained in this chapter. The chapter will seek to address the research question: What is the *nature* of the talk on Facebook in reaction to the episodes of violence meted on Gloria on the soapie, *Scandal*? This research question enables the study to conceptualise and assemble a set of discussion points that may shed light on our *awareness* of, and *how* we "talk" about, incredibly complex social change issues in the era of social media. The social change issue – indeed, social crisis – at the centre of this study is violence against women, often referred to as gender-based violence, with a particular focus on the sub-field of intimate partner violence.

We observed in Chapter 1 that violence against women is common, serious, and takes many forms. These forms include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. These forms also have profound implications for every aspect of women's lives. This study sought to establish the evolution of social discourse in the age of digital networks, with the hope that this investigation could shed light on ways that we can address gender-based-violence in South Africa and elsewhere. What does "social media talk" reveal in terms of participants' *awareness* of intimate partner violence? This chapter turns on this question. This study is ground breaking in the sense that it is based on the realisation that conversation is moving more and more onto social media platforms, and hence activism – if it is to remain relevant – will have to *follow the conversation*. This study is an attempt to foreground how we can, as it were, follow the conversation, and what we can learn from such following of the conversation. At the same time, it

sheds light on the *possibilities* and *limits* of, on the one hand, social media talk and, on the other hand, representation of gender violence. This study thus represents a new paradigm of attending to social discourse.

This study is, in one sense, about the convergence of social media and representation, focusing specifically on what Magestro (2015) would call "assault on the small screen". When local soap opera *Scandal* – a Monday-to-Friday drama set in a newsroom, centring on the interlaced personal lives of the staff that works in that newsroom – ran episodes on violence against women at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015, viewers took to the soap opera's Facebook page to comment about the representation. This activity of "social television" caught my attention and excited my interest. In a country where it is estimated that 40% percent of men assault their partners daily (Abrahams et al 2013) (translating to one in three women killed by a loved one every day), and where over 16 million people, out of a population of 60 million people, are on Facebook every month (Mazibuko 2017), this meeting of issues seemed to provide an opportunity to evaluate how people are talking about a topical social change issue. Using a purely observational "ethnographic" method known as netnography – purely observational because I did not take active part – I gathered data on how audiences interact online on specific topics culled from their favourite television shows. As noted in Chapter 4, I became a participant observer by simply liking the *Scandal* Facebook page. I intended that my presence not influence the nature, direction or outcome of the "talk", so did not take part in commenting or posting any content. *I simply went where the talk went*. Kozinets (2010: 87), the theorist behind netnography, emphasises that a netnographer should experience the online social interaction in the same way the participants do.

Audiences are what make media, otherwise the messages that media produce would be empty and meaningless. Soap operas themselves would mean very little without viewers' active participation. In the era of social television, the term "audiences" is no longer normatively definable particularly where new media technologies render audiences indistinguishable, fragmented, dispersed and "invisible" (Sandvos 2011). Yet audiences are real and human, with feelings, thoughts, agency and subjectivity, even when they are fragmented and dispersed. It is particularly important to examine the role of audiences because media function to shape public opinion and can also

exert positive or negative influences (Gunter 2000). South Africans spend an average seven hours and two minutes a day consuming video content and broadcast television, accounting for 42 percent of the time people spend in front of a television (TechCentral 2018). The rise of social television continues apace, as the Internet becomes the delivery mechanism that is fast becoming the preferred route to access television, radio and other content (Brown, 2009: 25). At the same time, the future leans on online streaming and on-demand video (mybroadband 2018). Currently, some 39 percent of the total networked population daily view free digital video sources such as YouTube and Facebook. In some estimates, 91 percent of mobile Internet access is used for social activities.[31] Whereas in the pre-social media era, talk about the previous evening's television fare normally took place in homes, work and social meeting places (Mboti 2016), a lot of that nowadays happens on social media. Together, the whole focus on how talk about social issues is seemingly migrating to, or at least is mirrored on, social media defines the phenomenon of social media talk, which in my study is drawn from 177 pages of comments, amounting to over 35 000 words.

Social television has the added importance of increasing the reach of people watching programmes since there are multiple ways of accessing content other than just the screen in the home. This makes television a much more resilient channel of communication in the digital age. One only needs a smart mobile device and access to data which is often via free WIFI at work to catch up with their favourite programmes and the conversations around it on the social media fan pages. The television set has become an interactive portal and a computer. It is no longer there just to educate, entertain and inform but is being used as a basis for the kind of creative "conversational chaos" associated with social media. Television combines with the social media to become a meeting place and market place for ideas, experience-sharing and learning platform for topical issues, as well as an opportunity to express anger and emotions in a way they may have not experienced before. The opportunity to address mass audiences was never there in the past. Yet social media accords them the possibility very simply. This is something that the mass media itself in its old form would not be able to provide.

[31] http://tag.microsoft.com/community/blog/t/the_growth_of_mobile_marketing_and_tagging.aspx

Scandal is ranked the 5th most popular soap opera in South Africa, watched by close to five million viewers daily (*Channel 24*, 2018). I chose *Scandal* as a focus of study not only because soap opera, by nature, attract talk, or that it is one of the longest running television dramas in South Africa (having been shown since 2005 but in fact because, as a soap opera), but because soapies give issues a "real life" effect that appeals to viewers who enjoy watching people and places that they are familiar with. Soap opera industry professionals "strive to create a moral text that will educate and enlighten as it entertains the audiences" (Blumenthal, 1997: 111). Soap opera is thus the "hook", the trigger, to the talk. Talk, in this context, is actually not cheap. As we contest ideas, some of them controversial, and test knowledge, share perspectives and narratives, and get involved in heated debates about what is wrong and right, the assertion that it is through "talk" that people are able to make sense of the world (cf. Tannen, 2005), and to frame social relations and shape identities rings true. Discussions with others, however trivial, can be identity-affirming and life-affirming.

After all, communication is a pillar of social life and social being. In this case, the soapie provided the story and plot lines on the issue of intimate partner violence, while social media the field in which raw data was to be mined. Social media make for "social" interactions that feel real (and complex) in many ways. If Lee (2011: 150) is correct, people "are living life online" and, for many, "life online is as real as life offline". Although, as Baym's (2000) research shows, audiences are still very much eager to watch soap opera and talk about them with family and friends Baym (2000: 14), much talk has moved on to social media pages. It appears that people go onto social media sites partly for FOMO (fear of missing out) (Brown, 2009: 18), but also to experience a separate online identity that is somehow an extension and a mirror of the offline one. The soap opera, on the other hand, genre gives viewers something to *talk about* because of the way it is structured – for instance, it stiches audiences into "endless narratives" (Brunsdon, 2000: 173).

"Talk" and television flowed in and out from each other, and interpersonal and "mass" communication could no longer be distinctly separated. As noted in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, the particular *Scandal* storyline that I focus on was chosen by the producers to mark the 16 days of activism – calendar commemoration aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of domestic violence and the need to stop it. Talk about the

episodes is important because gender violence remains a contentious issue everywhere it is discussed. There is, to this day, *no* consensus on such issues as prevalence and incidence, causal factors, and theoretical perspectives (Bergen 1998). While we may believe that VAW is a bad thing, and that it is endemic in every society (Heise, Pitanguy, and Germain, 1994), there remain lively and important debates about how violence against women and its causes should be *read*, *understood*, and *interpreted*. *Scandal* is viewed mostly by adults from the age of 25 years old, 60 percent of whom were women.

I have organised this chapter into interlinked sections, which present findings on a particular theme as extracted through thematic analysis, followed by analysis and discussion. The themes all relate to what "social media talk" reveals about its own possibilities and limits, understood in terms of Facebook participants' *awareness* of intimate partner violence and its multiform nature. This is the main aim of the chapter and, indeed, of the whole study. The analysis and discussion is structured in such a way that it weaves in literature (chapter 2) and theory (chapter 3). The chapter begins with a set of introductory tasks. Firstly, it presents a characterisation of Gloria and Obakeng. Secondly, it presents a synopsis of a selection of the six episodes that are the focus of the participants' "social media talk". This is done partly because the threads on social media also begin by helping those who did not watch the episodes "catch up". As such, one purpose of the synopses is to help the reader catch up with the issues and themes at play. The synopses helps contextualise the Facebook comments. Finally, I discuss findings in relation to the nature of the range of "awarenesses" displayed by the social media talk. What is fundamental in this study is the nature of "talk" that is generated and what we could learn from it. The study intends to get insights into the way audiences read, parse, critique or appreciate *Scandal*'s representation of intimate partner violence.

5.2 Limitations

Social media talk results from a give-and-take between the so-called "real world" and the online world – in this case, Facebook. The phenomenon would not be possible without either of the two. Facebook is seen in this study as a constrained platform for connecting *Like-minded* people. I use the word "Like-minded", with a capital "L" not only because the participants all like the same soap opera, *Scandal*, but because they click the Facebook "Like" button (see Fig 6 below). The conceptual genealogy of such

a group is worth commenting on. It is clear that it is because of *Scandal* that this group exists on Facebook in the first place. That is, members of the fan group do not like the soap opera *because* of Facebook. Rather, before there is social media, there is a prior fact of the existence of a community of a television audience, dispersed across South Africa and beyond, which watches *Scandal*. Social media weaves together these audiences, and allows them to speak to, with and against one another. So, the fact that all the participants watch and "love" *Scandal* fosters a feeling of connectedness and brings a sense of community that is *prior* to their use of social media. In this study, the culture of television watching merges with the online community of Facebook groups. Netnography, the method I drew on to gather data, itself revolves around those two terms: "culture" and "community" (Kozinets 2010: 5).

But without social media, the sense of community that we refer to is more imagined than real. Indeed, it is, in a sense, impossible – unless people meet physically to discuss their viewing of the soapie. The community is linked together by each member clicking the "like" button of the Fans of *Scandal* Facebook page. The "like" button enables this community to *come into being* as a Facebook "group". Through groups, members can post content. Through the mediation of the "like" button, fans of the soapie are able to interact with comments, emojis and photos. Once fans of *Scandal* click the "like" button, as I did in order to be part of the group, they are able to see displays of the number of other *Scandal* fans who "liked" the content. This display includes a full or partial list of those *Scandal* fans. In a sense, therefore, social media talk is enabled by Facebook's like button.

Fig 5.1: The communities on social media that participate in social media talk are primarily enabled via the mediation of the Facebook "like" button

In the case of the Facebook page that I studied, as with other "Like-minded" communities on the social media platform, one is able to comment only after one has "liked" the page. This is part of the internal geography and architecture of Facebook, constructed around algorithms and strict "Terms of Service" and "Community standards",[32] and is the sense in which I use the term "Like-minded". Any community that participates in social media talk on Facebook not only needs to use the "like' button but has to adhere to Facebook's "Terms of Service". So even if one loves Scandal but does not like to "like" the show on Facebook and does not like to adhere to Facebook's "Terms of Service", they will not get a chance to "talk" on social media.

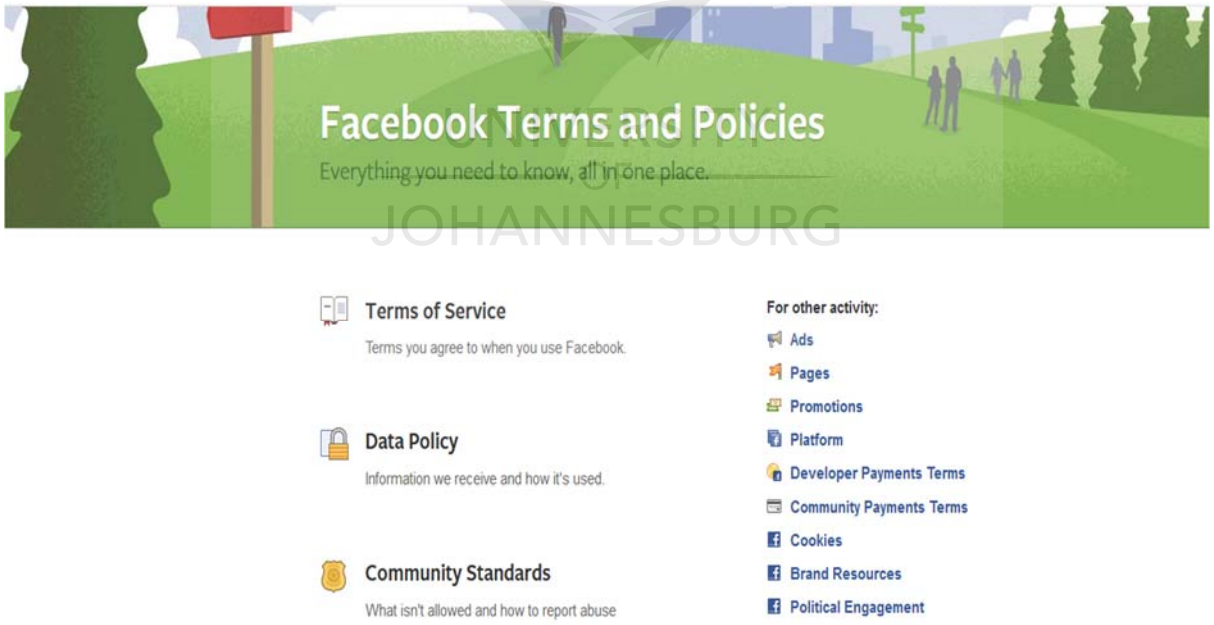
If one "talks" in a way that breaches Facebook's "Community standards", they will be banned from social media talk. Even when one gets permission to communicate on Facebook, their very means and techniques of communication are constrained by Facebook's tools and features. For instance, if one needs to react to something, they cannot just react in any way they like, but, rather, need to long-press the "like" button. By long pressing the "like" button, one gets an option to use one of 5 pre-defined emotions: "Love", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad", or "Angry". These options exist because Facebook does not allow its users to dislike content. Users are only allowed to like things. If one intends to express an emotion, they can only do so via the emoji picker provided by Facebook or choose from the available Facebook GIF. One cannot, for instance, upload their own GIFs. There is thus a myriad of built-in limitations to any form of social media talk.

Fuchs, in the chapter "Social Media as Ideology" in *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2017), argues that there is nothing innocent in Facebook's "Like" button. Rather, the whole architecture is implicated with power and ideology, and renders us powerless and exploited. He asserts that, in fact, Facebook advances "an ideology of liking" in the form of its "Like" button. We must thus be constantly alive to the political economy of Facebook, including its surveillance projects. I broadly concur with Fuchs. Once one is part of a group, and as long as one adheres to Facebook rules, they are able to speak on social media. There are few rules about how one can "talk" once one

[32] Facebook has five "community standards", namely i) Violence and criminal behaviour, ii) Safety iii) Objectionable content, iv) Integrity and authenticity v) Respecting intellectual property, and vi Content-related requests. https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/introduction

is ensconced in, and sutured to, Facebook's algorithms. People can pretty much say what they want (again, as long as what you say does not breach Facebook rules). Social media talk can be formal or informal, consequential or useless, weighty conversation or a notice board for small talk chit-chat. All this is on show on the *Scandal* fans' Facebook page. It is this multiform and intuitive conversation that offers significant insights, knowledge and meanings into our awareness on social issues such as gender violence.

Adding to the limitations is the fact that Internet access and connectivity in Africa are constrained due to infrastructural problems such as availability of fibre optics or any other technology reception structures such as in remote areas, high data costs and costs of digital technology devices. As alluded earlier 16 million South Africans out of a population of 60 million are on Facebook. There is likelihood that this talk is elitist, and off bounds many who are not on Facebook and who have no Internet access. There is a world-wide tendency to buy followers real or imagined although Facebook is going all out to clean out all fake accounts. This distorts the definition of audience.



5.2: Screenshot of the landing page of Facebook "Terms and Policies". These terms and policies constrain the direction, content and nature of social media talk.

I observed that members did not merely comment on *Scandal* but used the platform to "speak" to *Scandal*'s producers or broadcast their own messages to other fans. These uses ranged from wishing other fans a merry Christmas or merely greeting them, to catching-up on missed television episodes, to appealing to producers to change something on *Scandal* such as removing certain characters because they were boring or "too much". One participant routinely thanked her counterparts for keeping her updated through the comments. Members would also communicate their likes and dislikes of the soapie (see Fig 8 below, for an example), suggesting story lines, or use the platform to update each other on the latest news about the show. They would also post images and links and – indeed! – even advertise abortion clinics and enhancement treatments, and so on. One participant used the platform to announce a WhatsApp group she (or he) was forming and inviting those who wished to join it. The use of a group's platform to advertise products, to talk about Christmas, or to advertise a separate WhatsApp group is a form of trendjacking: when an interesting or trending topic is disrupted by irrelevant content from other users. There were many such posts in the content of the threads studied here. Users and administrators could, of course, report or block such trendjackers and trolls. The platform, however, notably allows audience participation and *fluidity*.

Fig 5.3: Some commenters directed their questions at Gloria, and others at the producers of the soapie (Screenshot by Author)

This is despite the original intentions of *Scandal*'s marketing team. The audience composition is not static, and the conversation is not always sustained by the same people. Commenters would come and go. This could be noticed from the fact that the profile names of those who ttake part in the talk keep changing.

The Facebook platform is a veritable cocktail of competing and cooperative interests. It is now an accepted norm for soap opera producers and marketing teams of television shows to create Facebook fan pages and encourage television viewers to continue conversations of their favourite programmes there. The producers and marketing team of *Scandal* use the Facebook platform primarily to drop excerpts, teasers and trailers deliberately and strategically in order to cause suspense and attract viewership. They also place "Last Night on Scandal" teasers in order to provoke audiences to talk, and to mine such feedback. Feedback is crucial in improving shows in the cut-throat ratings game. The producers would draw these trailers, cliffhangers and teasers as marketing gimmicks, from what they perceive to be the most moving, funny, and noteworthy parts of the soapie's episodes, but without producing spoilers.

The *Scandal* producers' quest to nail down audiences is a perpetual, ongoing affair, since audiences are a moving target. Audiences on the Facebook page rarely stick to the script but use the platform as they saw fit. There are, for instance, requests for the producers to "show us what's coming not what we have already watched". Participants would also comment on more than one story line in one posting – not just the Gloria/Obakeng issue. Some commenters try to predict and speculate about what is to come in the next episodes of the soapie, such as how Gloria was going to be rescued. The word "boring" cropped up often as commenters protested a particular story line or character. Basically:

> The institutions are never totally in control, as it were. Control is always sought after, but never completely achieved. As a result, the conquest of the audience is never something absolute and definitive; it is always a temporary victory, perpetually in danger of being eroded, constantly contested, or simply evaded. (Ang 1991: 34)

Essentially, audiences are dynamic and variable formations of people whose cultural and psychological boundaries are essentially uncertain. This is established, for instance, by the observation that not every commenter on the threads came to watch something or to comment on previous episodes or fresh trailers.

Rather, some commenters would come to the platform merely to re-connect with others after a long day, or simply for some comic relief. The variability of audiences

could also be seen in the differences in their expressive styles as well as their differing perspectives and differences of opinion. The platform could be used to express tame or strong and dissenting views. Participants, wherever they could, did not hold back on their views, no matter how controversial. Though not overly pronounced, there is also an element of cyber bullying. For example, there are “nasty” comments such as “it’s men like you that make women defer marriage”, “its women like you that allow men to turn women into punching bags”, “stupid comment from a female” and “I didn’t realise that you were a woman. That just makes it worse”. Whereas fan Facebook pages are created by producers and marketing departments mainly to push advertising and get public opinion about their products (Lacey 2002), audiences are eager to talk about their favourite shows and to put a stamp on and own whatever little communicative space opens. Audience’ use of the platform for wide-ranging issues that have nothing to do with the needs of the marketing departments show a latent resistance and subalternity.

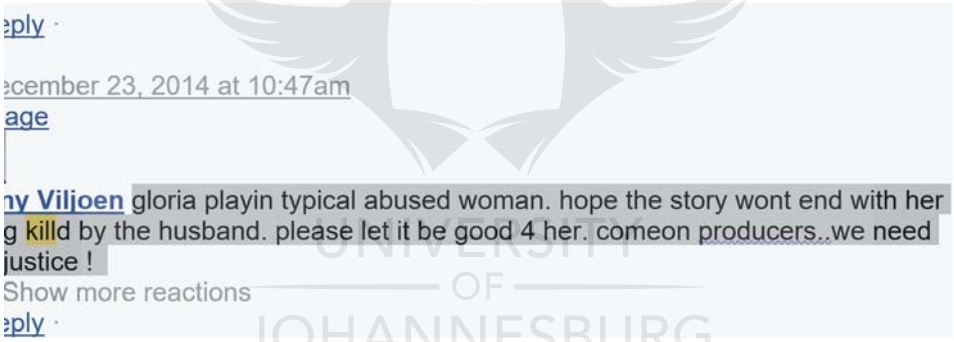


Fig 5.4: Participants did not hold back in their views (Screenshot by Author)

It is, and will remain, difficult to delineate and define social media talk participants merely from their chats. An example such as Fig 5.5 below shows that the member of the audience is Shona speaking and thus one could assume he/she is a Zimbabwean. But there is no useful information beyond this. It might be a female or male Zimbabwean. They might be based in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, or any other Southern African or African country. Indeed, they might be based anywhere in the world. Statistics from 2014 suggest that internet users are on average between 20 and 50 years old, with 51 percent of these being women (Global media monitoring report 2015). Furthermore, if it is true that soap operas have a historically

important relationship with women (Brunsdon 2001), and that soapies are “women’s terrain”, then it is possible that many of the commenters could have been women.

Further, the use of a distinct internet lexicon and slang suggests that they are millennials. But such conjecture is ultimately pointless and dangerous in our assessments of social media talk. After all, there is enough in the comments that could be taken to be revealing that some of the commenters might have been men, since ratings data show that men follow *Scandal* just as much as women, whether or not such men are sympathetic to women being abused. At any rate, the importance of the social media talk does not lie in ascriptions of gender but, rather, in interpreting the value of *ways of talking*.

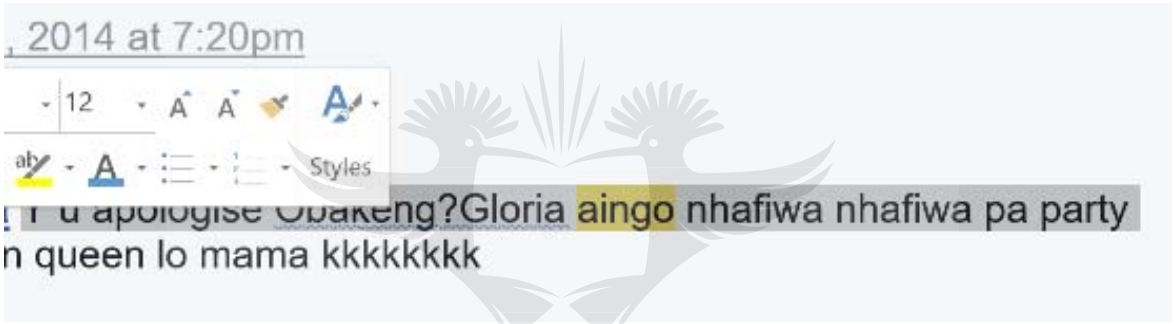


Fig 5.5: This comment is partly in Shona (Screenshot by Author)

Whereas the historical definition of audience would conjure an idea of people gathered at an event or place, with the virtual spaces that have been created due to new technologies audiences are increasingly becoming invisible and difficult to define. Baym (2011) asks “How can we be present yet also absent?” The audience that exists in the online space is both real and intangible. Yet these sometimes-faceless audiences have an even stronger voice and are not limited by fears of being visible. I describe them as faceless because even with a profile picture and name, they may not be who they say they are. In real life they could be the opposite of what they are portraying or purporting to be. This reminds me of a cultural idiom in my local language Shona which personifies a letter in the mail as a fearless person who could deliver any message regardless of whether it is controversial or not. While the letter is not a person, it contains messages that are crafted by a real person. Sometimes the person who craft the letter sign the letter with his/her real name but at other times it could be

anonymous. In the same vein, social media audiences can have the same effect of delivering messages as bona fide commenters or anonymously. Butsch (2008: 4) submits that, at any rate, audience is a "situated role" and a "temporary performance". Wiese et al (2014) did a gender analysis of South Africa's male and female university students' usage of Facebook and found out that more women were using Facebook than men. While in this current study it is not possible to tell with any large degree of certainty the gender (or race, class, age, nationality or ethnicity) of the commenters, I would say that any suggestion that more women than men are on social media is encouraging from a feminist point of view. Women's experiences and voices are mixing it up with male voices in the relative anonymity of social media. Women's voices may no longer be side-lined as in the past. I thus made an important assumption that Facebook pages such as the one under review can be a safe space for female audiences because they can come and go as they please.

Vasilescu et al (2012) note that online users often choose gender-neutral names, or opposite-sex names and profiles to cope in male-dominated environments. Where women are turned off by the blatant sexism of participants, they leave these communities. Gender neutral names or "male profiles" may help females to be accepted by the mostly male participants. At any rate, this current study did not actively seek to suss out participants' gender. Not only was it not possible, but it may not have been expressly desirable. Indeed, assessing opinions, views and ideas without attaching them to any gender has its own methodological advantages. For instance, it allows some form of objective analysis and helps with interpretive sense making unburdened by gender bias. What also makes the whole analysis of social media talk complex, anyway, is that we can never really know what is going on in each individual's head when they consume and react to media texts. We thus deal with what we see on the page. What you see is what you get.

Furthermore, what is peculiar about the audience in this study is that it is hard to fix in place as the conversation is not among the same sets of commenters, judging from the variability in the names. Only a few names keet on re-appearing while more new people continuing to join in the "talk". This fluidity of the audience thus makes it difficult to assign a definition to it. At the same time, it is hard to call them fans or a community because they do not stay in the same place long enough to constitute fandom. At the

same time, social television commentators see a connection between television viewers and fandoms. Jenkins (2005: 284) describes fandom as a “base for consumer activism who speak back”, are “assertive” and “opinionated” about their favourite programmes. Television soap operas are therefore famous because of loyalty from fans. This may be true considering that the main *Scandal* Facebook page was established in 2005 at a time when Facebook had just launched. Fandom, indeed, is actually the reason behind, soap opera industry professionals striving to create, as noted earlier, “a moral text that will educate and enlighten as it entertains the audiences” (Blumenthal, 1997: 111).

Whereas it is hard to make a conclusion that the same audience who watch *Scandal* are the ones that post comments on the *Scandal* Facebook platform, those who proceed to post the comments, however, can be viewed as fans. They go beyond just watching the soap opera. That is, they appear to have more passion, commitment and fanaticism that drive them to and from the show to the Facebook page. At any rate, as Busse and Gray (2011) suggest, there is no one type of fans anymore. Old, normative definitions no longer hold. There is now much fluidity and variability involved. Furthermore, if one takes Jenkins’ assertions (2005), then these are fans because they are part of a (feminine?) discourse which others may conceive as “gossip” but which helps to “transform issues of public concern into topics of personal significance”. Baym (2000) refers to earlier forums as having been like a “base” on which “strong traditions and a clear identity group” were built upon. She viewed a given forum as a “social world that felt like a community” because the audience stayed on the forum over time. The Facebook fans on *Scandal*, on the other hand, are elusive and always changing.

Although this variability make for an eclectic mix of opinions and broaden the realm of the conversation, the reason for the ever-shifting audience is a subject that needs further investigation in future studies. Still, all the participants seemed familiar with the television soapie. At least, none indicated otherwise. From this point of view at least, the audiences may be viewed as a genuine community. In the past the private and intimate discourse of gossip provided an opportunity for women to discuss controversial concerns in a forum considered free of patriarchal influence because gossip was “frivolous and silly” and hence was only associated with women. Social

media such as Facebook appear to be the new alternative forums for discussing these topical issues. However, there is no way of discovering the true gender identity of participants.

Despite the ever-evolving nature of the audience, it was noted that the “talk” somehow continued uninterrupted. This can be partly attributed to technology which allows such conversations to continue as long as one has access to the Internet and to Facebook, and a sustained interest in the topic to want to add their opinion or “like” what is being said. Facebook becomes the meeting point of minds and interests, albeit ephemerally. Part of this convergence is captured in what Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg once said when he, talking about Facebook, stated that “we exist at the intersection of technology and social issues’’ (Lee 2011: xiii). The ceaseless flow of commenters meant that those who join in at this point or that get to comment on posts by those who have already left the conversation, and so on and so forth. This type of audience is different from the pre-Facebook ones because people would have to converge at some physical place to have this “thread” of conversation. As earlier stated, these kinds of “talk” where multitudes of people can chat concurrently regardless of geographical location and time were not possible pre-social media era. It is a highly unique way of interacting as it often leaves traces of audiences’ consumption practice, as they comment on texts (Livingstone 2004: 85). There is an acknowledgement that research such as this one which takes a closer look at audiences’ interaction online helps add new knowledge about audience participation online (Couldry 2011).

Whatever uses the social media platform is put to, the audiences become, as Graham and Jahru (2018: 18) would say, *deliberating publics* using the talking points provided by the producers (or by other commenters) and the communicative spaces offered by social media pages, features and tools. The agenda-setting on gender violence, however, does not begin with the “Last Night on Scandal” teasers and trailers. Rather, it begins much, much earlier, with the script and the producers of the show. Judging from the posts studied, the agenda by *Scandal* seemed to be that of not only raising awareness about gender-based violence, but to initiate debate around the topic in a bid to generate dialogue as well as help foster behavioural change among audiences against domestic violence, including changing mindsets of audiences on how to deal with conflict in relationships.

This convergence of two media platforms, television and social media, results in a multi-communication flow of ideas in that audiences have a chance to react to what they watch on television through Facebook in real-time, regardless of geographical space. This convergence and participation was well-nigh impossible in the pre-social media era. In this sense, social television has enabled the exploration of new horizons in reception studies. Aaker, Smith and Adler (2010) state that matching distinct media types with distinct audiences allows for more engagement and empowerment. In the same way that, before the invention of printing and writing, sender and receiver needed to be in the same space and time for communication to occur, the pre-social media era in the 20th century and early 21st century had no way of tapping into the worlds of viewing audiences in real time. All this has changed drastically in the last decade.

Scholars such as Levine (1985) had seen the social media coming, but without actually knowing how this was going to look like or how it was going to change the media landscape. Levine had, at the time, commented presciently on the need for television soap opera producers to find innovative ways of communicating with their fans. She noted that there were opportunities for shows not only to learn from viewers but to develop direct ways of communicating "with them, potentially providing soapies with avenues for testing ideas with viewers ahead of time and fostering feelings of collaboration amongst soap opera fans and the industry." Levine even speculated about the "significant advertising and other revenue opportunities" that would come with that. In the 1990's she had observed that fans were using the Internet to communicate about their shows.

Levine reckoned that soap opera producers would use these comments to improve their productions and take into consideration viewers' suggestions and feedback to keep their ratings high. It was also at this time that Internet soap opera board messages and chat rooms mushroomed. A notable aspect of these mushrooming phenomena was their ability to offer marginalised groups such as women space to discuss issues of concern publicly. However, these spaces never grew in stature, accessibility, and ease of use in the manner in which Facebook, which boasts of a billion daily users, eventually did. Up until the creation of social media, it was virtually

impossible to have simultaneous multi-media interaction regardless of geographical space and time. The usual main limitation to this type of "talk" was inter-face. Using online spaces has, however, altered how people interact and engage. The easy linkability of online material helps spread messages faster and wider, at times trending and going viral.

Humour, satire and memes interlaced the comment threads on *Scandal*'s Facebook fan page. The meme below (Fig 5.6) is of an invitation to join other members in posting comments. It simply says, "if you are here for comments please join me", and ""I just came here to read comments" and displays on the left a free sitting place on a bench and a freeze frame from *Thriller* of a young Michael Jackson eating popcorn in a cinema. There is, in this meme, an acknowledgement that comment threads for groups are a form of entertainment in their own right. In my case, I considered the threads a source of important research on the content of social media talk in relation to *Scandal*'s representation of gender violence. The meme also indicates that not everyone who comes to the *Scandal* Facebook page does so to comment. Some just come to read and "like" or react to other people's comments. Again, this emphasises that there is value in the comments. It is this value that this study mines for.

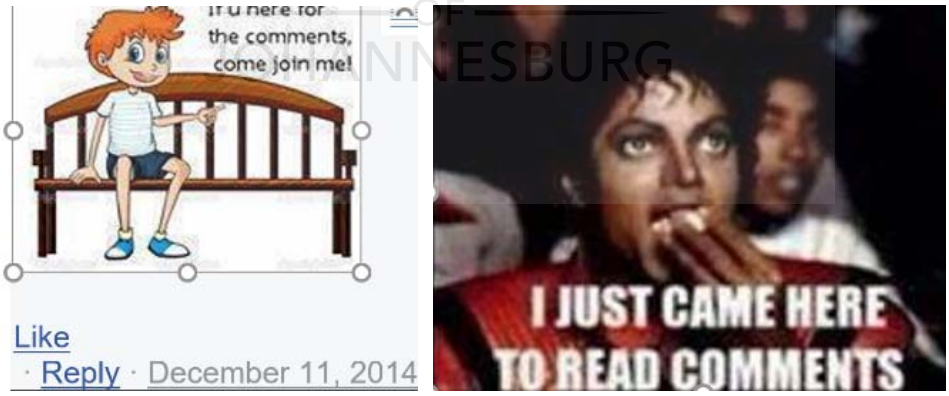


Fig 5.6: "If you are for the comments, come join me!" and "I just came here to read comments"

Some of the talk would be about the acting style of a character, or their perceived character strengths or flaws. At other times, participants would react to the storyline of a particular episode. The Facebook page would thus be used as a communication

platform for the audience to express their views and opinions, perceptions, attitudes and knowledge about the characters in the soap opera, running commentary on the quality of the work of the producers, directors and scriptwriters, and reflecting on how the participants' everyday lives measure up to the soapie and vice versa. Sometimes the talk is a running "pitchside" commentary or umpiring directed at the characters, such as "err Gloria don't defend him maan, (man) he will hit you again and again, and again!" "Why do you keep defending the fool?" "Gloria is being abused *mara* (but) shes (she's) too blind to see", and so on. The boundary between interpersonal, intrapersonal, and mass communication is here effectively blurred. As noted, the talk mirrors what has now become the conventional function of social television: to communicate to producers of the soap opera, and in a sense co-produce the show. Sentiments, concerns, grievances or praise alike are delivered as part of the constant flow of comments. The constant flow of comments on the platform is also testimony that *Scandal* continues to enjoy sustained loyal viewership (at least it did for the period of this study).

As we will see in the extended discussion below, the nature and content of the talk allows the platform to play a central role in the construction and contestation of meanings about intimate partner violence, and reveals intimate details drawn from the participants' own offline lives. The unspoken becomes spoken, and the visible becomes invisible. People use the platform to vent or laugh, to express pleasure or disgust, and so on. For instance, laughter is signposted by a neologism such as *kkkk*, and disgust by *nxa*. Such inventions subtly displace Facebook's 5 pre-defined emotions, "Love", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad", or "Angry". Social media talk, in this way, incorporates a creative dissidence that negotiates the proprietary "Terms of Service" of the respective social media platforms. Replacing Facebook's "Haha" with their own *kkkk*, and Facebook's "Angry" with their own *nxa*, fits this aspect of creative dissidence.

It can also be observed that social media talk is not really talk but is text (written words) typed on a digital device's keypad. The way this "talk" is written is immensely creative. It poses grammatical, spelling and syntactic challenges because postings are rarely in full sentences or formal spelling and grammar. There is no due attention to normative writing rules. Again, there is no Facebook rules against inventing one's own

“language”, grammar, spelling and syntax. Hence words are often shortened, abbreviated and invented. For instance, “is” is written “z”, “why” is “y”, “people” is “Ppl”, “greatest of all time” is “GOAT”, “great” is “gr8”, “family” is “fam”, “to be honest” is “tbh”, “in my opinion” is “imo”, “lit” means “awesome”, and so on (see Fig 12 below). In such a lexicon, “salty” means a bitter person, “sus” means scandalous, “extra” means one is trying too hard, “clapback” is to respond cleverly to negativity, “Bible” means you are speaking the truth, and “woke” means clever. This invention and use of a new lexicon indicate that the commenters could have been mostly millennials. If formal language demonstrates professionalism, authority and seriousness, the language of social media talk is informal, conversational, unstructured and has personality and warmth. It can be emotional, serious, angry, disrespectful or funny. But it is never dry or lacking in warmth or personality. It is these qualities that identify such discourse as “talk”, because it is very close to how we would talk in real world settings. People seldom use formal language and punctuations in everyday conversations, as this would be very weird. Such slang can also be rich in meaning. As GK Chesterton says, “All slang is metaphor, and all metaphor is poetry”. The lexicon of social media talk, apart from being whimsical (or perhaps because it is whimsical) also has a short life span, and some of the words that were popular and in use in 2014 are no longer in use 2019. A few, however, have endured.

As Baym (2000) succinctly argues, this type of “talk” is different from the verbal “talk” we know because there is no body movement, vocal tone, rate or volume. It is also different in another sense: if the audiences were put in a room to engage in this type of conversation, there would be Babel, chaos and unbearable noise. Social media talk cannot exist anywhere else *but* on social media. There is much “conversational chaos”, creativity, creative destruction, and invention that is uniquely involved. The audiences would be talking to each other but at the same time talk past each other. At times, one would say what they are thinking, not necessarily replying to the other. One posting would be addressed to the administrators, while the next comment will pose questions to the characters. Yet another post would be responding to what others have commented on or addressing other fans. It is hard to create consistently coherent threads of the conversation.

AFAIK	As Far As I Know	LMAO	Laughing My A** Off
AMA	Ask Me Anything	LMK	Let Me Know
BAE	Before Anyone Else	LOL	Laughing Out Loud
BFF	Best Friends Forever	NBD	No Big Deal
BRB	Be Right Back	NM	Not Much
BTW	By The Way	NVM	Nevermind
FBO	Facebook Official	NSFW	Not Safe For Work
FF	Follow Friday	OH	Overheard
FOMO	Fear Of Missing Out	OMG	Oh My God/Gosh
FTW	For The Win	OMW	On My Way
FYI	For Your Information	PODT	Photo Of The Day
GTG	Got To Go	PPL	People
ICYMI	In Case You Missed It	QOTD	Quote Of The Day
IDC	I Don't Care	ROFL	Rolling On The Floor Laughing
IDK	I Don't Know	SMH	Shaking My Head
ILY	I Love You	TBH	To Be Honest
IMHO	In My Humble Opinion	TBT	Throwback Thursday
IMO	In My Opinion	TL;DR	Too Long; Didn't Read
IRL	In Real Life	WTF	What The F***
JK	Just Kidding	YOLO	You Only Live Once

Table 5.1: Some examples of acronyms used in social media "talk.

The Facebook chats studied here were not a turn taking or linear conversation where one listens while the other is talking. Rather, online interaction uses "posts, the equivalent of conversational turns" as Baym (2000: 09) observes. It can be concluded that social media is recreating conversation norms different from what we know and understand. Audiences get to pick conversations they want to react or respond to at the time they want to. At the same time, this variability and "conversational chaos" does not stop the conversations. The process of sense making is thus challenging for any researcher, but at the same time not impossible. What it does is disrupt the normative process of interpersonal and mass communication, while setting up its own forms of talk. When people gather in an online space to talk about a television show they become mass audience, yet the messages directed to individuals within the group is interpersonal as it is mass communication because it is available for all to read (Baym 2011). So, what is personal becomes mass, causing private spaces to increasingly connect and overlap with public spaces (Morley 2010; Blossom 2009: 31).

Still, there is reward in the fact that participants consistently experience their online interaction as “talk”.

Social media talk of the kind spoken in South Africa is intensely multilingual. That is, English is not the only medium of communication used. Rather, participants use their own indigenous languages such as Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Shona, Xhosa, Ndebele and Afrikaans, among others, to express themselves. For example, the comment in Fig 5.5 is in three languages: English, Shona and Zulu. This is a total of 3 languages in one sentence. Although there is a translation button, some of the translation hardly make sense, more so because the words are not spelt in full English. The use of local idioms and slang on top of the usual internet lexicon makes social media talk a completely new beast in terms of expression. One not only has to know what the English slang words mean, but uniquely South Africa lingo such as “mara”, “bathong” and “haaibo!” Facebook is transformed into a market place of ideas and knowledge as well as language, metaphor and idioms.

Fig 5.7 Marjorie Langa, who plays Gloria in eTV’s Scandal (Source: etv.co.za)

5.3 Scandal characters at the centre of the study

Gloria

The character of Gloria Rangaka is played by South African actress, Marjorie Langa. Gloria is a single mother of two in her late forties who lives in the township of Soweto and works at NFH/*the Voice* newspaper as a cleaner. At work Gloria is often seen in her black and green uniform. In the episodes under review she has just come out of an unhappy separation with Abel, the only man she had ever been with in her adult life, and the father of her two children. Prior to meeting Obakeng, Gloria had been married to Abel for 20 years. Abel has been "snatched" by Portia, a rival of Gloria's. She meets Obakeng after unsuccessfully trying to wrest Abel back from Portia. Just as she is about to wed, Abel comes back into her life, asking for forgiveness and wanting her to take him back. Gloria, however, decides against this and marries Obakeng. Gloria is a strong matriarch who is able to hold together a household as a single woman in the township of Soweto, taking care of her daughter and son from the proceeds of her job as a cleaner. Gloria loves her family, and is very protective of them. Indeed, her children always come first. Before her marriage to Obakeng, Gloria is a bubbly personality, an opinionated, competitive, independent minded and ambitious character. This is despite, or over and above, the fact she is a "mere" cleaner. She has earned the nickname "dimples" because she is always smiling, amplifying her dimples.

Fig 5.8: Gloria (Source: etv.co.za)

Gloria is shown as a proud, even conceited, township woman who considers herself to be of a higher status than other ordinary township women. Throughout, she labours under the burden of the politics of respectability; she is a hustler who thirsts for high status. Her damaging pride and tragic flaw is shown in her constant attempts to keep up appearances. She has dreams of living “the good life” and keeps getting into hare-brained money-making schemes that often backfire. For instance, she secretly sells dodgy merchandise at work as she tries to get rich quick (akin to being a snake oil salesperson). In keeping with this acquisitive and cheating personality, she instructed her aunts to ask for R20, 000 for her own lobola (of whom only one of the aunts was

really her bona fide aunt), but to negotiate it down to R15, 000 if they had to. She would then give them 10% each and keep 80% of the money for herself. She also involves herself in petty squabbles with her workmates and neighbours and is the source of gossip and rumour-mongering both at home and at work.

Fig 5.9: Gloria is talkative, gossipy and not averse to provoking quarrels with neighbours and workmates alike.

Gloria seems impulsive and impressionable. She wears her heart on her sleeve and can be gullible. On the eve of her wedding, she gushes, “I finally get to wear that white dress I've longed for. I mean really I’ve been with Abel for 20 years and he never bothered to pay *lobola*, at the very least. OMG I feel so alive, wanted, and loved. I feel so young again! I want to see his face when he sees me in my wedding gown. He makes me feel sexy and desired. I don't remember when last a man looked at me in that way.” She seems so smitten by Obakeng that she drops her guard completely. Gloria had high hopes for her marriage to Obakeng – she saw herself living with him for “the next twenty years”. The “next twenty years”, she said, “are going to be great; more loving and getting to know each other”. At the very least, she seems too trusting

in this relationship, a factor which might have made it easier for Obakeng to abuse her.

In terms of her physical appearance, Gloria fits the stereotype of the township "umagogo" (granny), often overweight, loud, talkative, gossipy, and accoutred in the uniform of domestic workers. She is a Christian, but she also provokes quarrels and pokes her nose in her neighbours' and workmates' business. However, what is clear is that Gloria loves her family and will sacrifice everything for her son and daughter (Gontse, played by Gabisile Tshabalala), even if some of her methods for seeking to get what she wants are of doubtful morality. As noted, during the *lobola* negotiations she does something culturally unheard of when she tries to make money (to profit) off her own marriage. She even dared to hire one of the "aunts" who represented her in the *lobola* negotiations with Obakeng's people! Indeed, her daughter Gontse, is the moral compass of the family, and is often counselling her mother whenever she crosses the line. It could be said that Gloria plays her role well as one of the key personalities of the *secondary Scandal*. That said, it does not seem that Gloria does any of the bad things she does out of malice or hatred.

Gloria is an object of both fascination and revilement. She seems to be one of those women fated to always be single, like the character of Queen in *Generations*, Wallet in *Skeem Saam* and Nonny in *Muvhango*. In *Black Sexual Politics* Hill Collins argues that there are three primary stereotypes of Black women: Mammy (the asexual/deferential caregiver); Jezebel (the manipulative seductress); and Sapphire (the angry, loud, aggressive matriarch). It is interesting that Gloria seems to be all of these in one. She is a fat, desexualised, deferential cleaner/domestic worker, who serves the economic interests of the corporate hierarchy of the *Scandal* newsroom; although not quite a seductress, she is nevertheless manipulative in her social relations; and she is a loud, domineering (though not quite angry and aggressive) matriarch. The Mammy figure, says Townes, "Because she is single and works, she cannot supervise her children, and this contributes to their failure in school and in society. She is single because she is overly aggressive and unfeminine. She emasculates her lovers and husbands who either refuse to marry her or desert her." All these are images that sustain the sexist, patriarchal and racist control of black women. This character and characterisation of Gloria, in particular, presents what

Crumpton (2014: 4) refers to as a cultural context that violates black women "through stereotypes and social processes that rendered them simultaneously invincible on one hand and inherently deserving of punishment on the other".

Obakeng

The character of Obakeng Rangaka is played by South African actor, Peter Moruakgomo. We are introduced to Obakeng as a sales rep and divorcee living alone in Soweto. He is a respected man in the community. He comes to NFH to sell cleaning products, where he meets Gloria and finds love rather unexpectedly. When we first meet him, Obakeng is cast as a nice, if conservative and secretive, guy. He is unassuming, loving and charming, qualities which sweep Gloria off her feet. The episodes in which he courts and proposes show him to be a charming and sincere gentleman. He declares his love for Gloria in public, going down on his knee at a Christmas party to say to her, "Gloria my love, I haven't known you for long, but I do know one thing, I love you and I can't spend another day without you. You complete me. I'm not a young man anymore; I don't have time for games. I want you to be mine forever." Obakeng claims to have left his ex-wife because she did not love or respect him. He filed for divorce because he claimed that she did not have time for him and always made him feel empty and belittled. Lamia (2013) says that "Those on the rebound are assumed to be distressed, shamed, angry, or sad." She also adds that "Those on the rebound may experience shame and consequently express anger and resentment toward their previous partner". Obakeng appears to fit this profile.

It appears that, in Gloria, Obakeng found the opposite of his ex-wife. At the beginning of their relationship, up to the point of their wedding, Gloria describes Obakeng using the most elevated adjectives. She calls him "spontaneous", "a man who truly loves me, a man who puts me first in his life", and "the sweetest and most loving man I know". However, it is not entirely clear that Obakeng is telling the whole truth about the reasons for his divorce. Certainly, his step-daughter to be, Gontse, remains suspicious of him. Obakeng is conflicted because his mother does not like his new wife and refuses either to bless the marriage or to attend the wedding. However, he goes ahead without his mother's blessing, even though it was extremely important to him. Obakeng had even gone back home to Brits to request his uncles to try to

persuade his mother to attend the wedding, to no avail. He nearly missed the wedding day because of his attempts to convince his mother to like Gloria.

Fig 5.10: Peter Moruakgomo, who plays Obakeng on eTV's Scandal (Source: etv.co.za)

This study grapples with the manner in which Obakeng turns from charming gentleman to a partner abuser, and the reasons for this transformation. Do social media audiences of *Scandal* see him as a congenital abuser or merely someone who turns rogue? Johnson (1995) identifies two types of intimate partner, or couple, violence. He calls them patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence. These two types of violence are very different from each other in terms of "the purpose of violence, the frequency at which it occurs, the gendered nature of violence, and the prevalence of it among couples" (Wright 2011: 10).

Patriarchal terrorism is defined as “a product of patriarchal traditions of men’s right to control ‘their’ women”, “a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics” (Johnson 1995: 284). This kind of violence is always likely to escalate. It is also “almost exclusively initiated by the husband, most wives never attempt to fight back, and, among those who do, about one-third quickly desist, leaving only a small minority of cases in which the women respond even with self-defensive violence” (Johnson 1995: 287).

Common couple violence, on the other hand, “is less a product of patriarchy, and more a product of the less- gendered causal processes…. The dynamic is one in which conflict occasionally gets ‘out of hand,’ leading usually to ‘minor’ forms of violence, and more rarely escalating into serious, sometimes even life-threatening, forms of violence” (Johnson 1995: 285). That is, common couple violence refers to violence which largely arises from arguments, frustration, or stressors which individuals or couples experience (Johnson, 1995; Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). Gloria, as much as Obakeng, could have initiated this kind of violence. Common couple violence, as such, is supposedly an intermittent response to the occasional conflicts of everyday life, motivated by a need to control in the specific situation. Unlike patriarchal terrorism, it does not escalate.

So, is Obakeng a patriarchal terrorist or just a perpetrator of common couple violence? What could have caused him to turn into an abuser? Was it individual and couple-level factors, or structural and systemic factors? Did he feel that Gloria was disrespecting him as his ex-wife allegedly used to do? Was the abuse brought about by children in the household (cf. DeMaris et al., 2003; Yount, 2005), employment dynamics between partners (cf. MacMillian and Gartner, 1999), or traditional gender role ideologies (cf. Sugarman and Frankel, 1996; Yount and Li, 2009). Wright (2011: 9) points out that, according to social disorganisation theory, structural characteristics of neighbourhoods, such as severe economic “disadvantage” can influences types and rates of intimate partner violence. One factor Obakeng seems to use is the fact that he dislikes the way Gloria disrespects his mother.

Wright (2011: 9) notes, most debate in literature about intimate partner violence "revolves around whether violence between partners should be measured in terms of the acts or consequences of IPV". Acts would be things such as hitting or shoving, while consequences refer to seriousness of injury inflicted by the violence. How did Obakeng abuse Gloria? Did he hit her or shove her? How severe was the abuse? The distinction between patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence is critical in our assessment of the nature of social media talk about gender violence and the extent to which audiences are aware of these issues. Is such a hard binarity feasible? Is it possible for Obakeng to have been both, or neither? We notice, for instance, that when the abuse started he would criticise her for every single thing, lash out at her at every conceivable point, and criticises her friends. Gloria could never do anything right. So, is this patriarchal terrorism or common couple violence? More importantly, is the distinction between the two reflected in the *social media talk*? If so, how is it reflected? The answer to whether Obakeng is a patriarchal terrorist or just a perpetrator of common couple violence may be best answered by making findings in relation to "intimacy". That is, we need to discuss the "intimate" in intimate partner violence and examine its range of meanings.

5.4 Contexts of Intimacy

The series of episodes analysed in this Chapter begin with Gloria meeting Obakeng, a senior salesman for a successful cleaning production company in Johannesburg. Obakeng is a divorcee who lived in Soweto. Gloria had also just divorced from her first husband, Abel, who left her for another woman. Although she pretends to be managing to handle the fallout from the divorce, Gloria is in reality not coping all that well with the situation. She feels humiliated to be single and seems intent on proving to society that she could find another man without any fuss. Thus, prior to meeting Obakeng, she had tried online dating, but without any success. She also gate-crashed her friend's bible study in the hope of meeting a new man, thus, to quickly forget Abel. Because all her attempts of "getting" a man had failed, Gloria had virtually given up hope until she serendipitously meets Obakeng. Obakeng had visited NFH, a company where Gloria works as a cleaner, to sell his products. Gloria falls in love "at first sight" with Obakeng. Despite being smitten with him, Gloria initially plays hard to get. However, Obakeng is persistent and eventually Gloria agrees to start a relationship.

Fig 5.11: Obakeng wooing Gloria who had been playing hard to get

The screenshot in Fig 5.11 above shows the early days of the courtship between Gloria and Obakeng. The image is instructive for a number of reasons. Firstly, the background shows the humble setting that brings together the two lovebirds. Both deal with cleaning and cleaning materials, and thus belong in a lower socio-economic order than the typical *Scandal* star actors. Neither Gloria nor Obakeng feature in the original plot of *Scandal* as a soapie about "the newsroom at *The Voice*" and "the lives and beds of the investigative reporters, photographers and editors who will go to any lengths to break the story first."[33] Rather, the two belong in the invisible class of the supporting cast of maintenance workers. Their romance is thus almost an afterthought in the larger scheme of things of *Scandal*. Obakeng's picture is even missing from the roll of the cast, suggesting that he is not one of the 22 main characters. This is true, as his character comes and goes. Certainly, in the plotline of *Scandal*, whatever the likes of Gloria and Obakeng do is meant to be a side-plot.

This last aspect about the side plot of *Scandal* is critical in two ways. Firstly, it draws in the audience's voyeuristic gaze towards the storyline involving Gloria and Obakeng.

[33] "*Scandal* – About the Show", http://www.etv.co.za/view/about/168

As noted, the typical "scandals" of *Scandal* are those of the reporters and journalists in the newsroom of the Voice, not the cleaners or delivery "boys". Anything centering on the lives of the cleaners or the delivery staff is likely to be seen as a titillating peek at the lives of the "extras", the supporting cast, the "other" and the subaltern of *Scandal*, bringing with it the same fascination and prurient curiosity that tourists have for the exotic. The drama of gender violence involving Gloria and Obakeng is "exotic" and unusual in the larger scheme of things of *Scandal*. It is a *secondary scandal*, a point that allows us to posit a sort of binary between *primary scandal* (the main cast of the Voice) and *secondary scandal* (the cleaners, messengers, delivery boys, and so on). This voyeurism of *secondary scandal*, as we shall see, shapes some of the social media talk that we shall look at. Such voyeurism-driven social media talk has something of the quality that Chase and Levenson in *The Spectacle of Intimacy* (2000: 12) call "the eruption of family life into the light of unrelenting public discussion". How much awareness of intimate partner violence *as a social problem* is reflected in the social media talk of voyeuristic audiences?

This first point about the voyeuristic social media talk leads us to the second point regarding the importance of the side plot involving Gloria and Obakeng. Normally, the class of domestic workers and gardeners is not thought of as providing proper characters who have fuller, fully-fleshed and rounded lives. Rather, they are often flat characters (the "servants") who are seen in the background, cleaning and delivering things. The violence that ensues between them is not comparable to that of the stars at the Voice newspaper. Indeed, "their" marginal violence is not meant to be the focus of our sustained attention. By focusing the spotlight on the margins and making the violence there interesting and worth our attention, *Scandal* mainstream the topic of gender violence in the "lower" classes that is not normally seen and forces us to reckon with it. Whereas violence against women all too often remains invisible, violence against poor women remains singularly invisible. Das Gupta (1998: 210) refers to this as an "attitude of disregard", which frames our readings of "violence in 'Other' women's lives". Indeed, poor women are particularly at risk of victimisation (Belle, 1990; O'Carroll and Mercy, 1986). Obakeng and Gloria being to Scandal a *domesticity* that is not typical of the *publicity* (or public-ness) newsroom stars. This domesticity/publicity binary is critical to the conception of intimacy that is necessary to our later critique of intimate partner violence. At the same time, it remains debatable, however, if *Scandal*

manages to fully make the plot of gender violence involving Obakeng and Gloria plausible in light of the fact that these characters do not fit into the normative cast and plotline of the soapie.

The critical take away from Fig 5.11 is the way it suggests the *intimacy* between Gloria and Obakeng. The semiology of the image provides textual, visual, political, personal clues to why the two may be in love. The background of cleaning materials and detergents in Fig 5.11 suggests that Obakeng and Gloria fell in love because they share something in common. They belong in the same socio-economic class and share the same job profile. Furthermore, both are divorcees, who are thus united by the same emotional circumstances. However, Obakeng, in his formal clothes and clean-cut look as a salesman, is more worldly wise than Gloria since his job sees him travel across South Africa. In the image, he is putting on the charm and causing Gloria to smile and blush with pleasure. As such, the initial meetings between the two point to a stable future relationship. At least, Gloria seems to have no doubt in her mind that Obakeng is the right man for her. There is little at this stage to suggest dark clouds on the horizon, and none of what Bergen (1998: x) would call "courtship violence". Indeed, it is precisely at this stage that the *intimacy* between the two is born. I have chosen this image precisely to reflect this intimacy. Without this intimacy, it is difficult to speak of intimate partner violence. At the same time, I believe that the fact that both Gloria and Obakeng are divorcees sets up the seeds of the gender abuse that follows. Beneath the veneer of intimacy trouble was brewing. The tranquil or honeymoon phase was not going to last.

The observation that beneath the veneer of intimacy trouble was brewing is crucial in evaluating intimate partner violence because the notion of "intimate violence" seems an oxymoron. How can people who are intimate be violent? One normative definition by the National Academy of Sciences panel on "Assessing Family Violence Interventions" is that:

> (I)ntimate violence may include acts that are physically and emotionally harmful or that carry the potential to cause physical harm. Abuse of adult partners may include sexual coercion or assaults, physical intimidation, threats to kill or harm, restraint of

> normal activities or freedom, and denial of access to resources. (National Research Council, 1998: 19)

Bearing emphasis is the fact that all these acts of violence are occurring in a context of intimacy. It is conceivably this very tension which is critical to understanding gender violence, particularly why the home may be the most dangerous place for women in South Africa and why abused women may continue to bear abuse and to be wed to violence without immediately getting out of the relationship. Indeed, the abuser and abused might have an "intense connection", such that a battered woman might keep going back to her abuser (cf. Mills 1998).

Why does Gloria tolerate Obakeng's violence? Why does she not just walk away? In reality, things may not be so simple. It may not be so much that Gloria is too weak to leave an abusive Obakeng, as that the situation is much more complex than meets the eye. Jacobson and Gottman (1998, cited in Jordan et al. 2004: 15) suggest that "fear of the offender and the risk of harm to which he exposes the victim may influence a woman to remain in the violent relationship". Will the criminal justice not fail the victim? What will happen to the abuser? Why should outsiders get involved in the domestic space? Who does not have (their own) problems? Women may harbour *second thoughts* about the aftermath of divorce, of the possible break up of families, and the hurt visited on children. An abusive man might love his children. The notion of *second thoughts* is an important one. It points to the victim having agency and subjectivity. The abused is not an empty vessel: rather, she pauses to think and reflect on what is going on, and she weighs options. She is faced by many imponderables, largely brought about by the fact that she shares a hard-to-measure degree of intimacy with the abuser.

Certainly, domestic violence is complicated by this domesticity – this intimacy. In this regard, we are called upon to be alive to what Mills in *The Heart of Intimate Abuse* (1998: 6) calls "the dynamics of domestic violence", incorporating the roles that love, religion, culture, race, fear, and financial dependence play in the battered woman's life. Hence:

> At the heart of intimate abuse are the dynamics of domestic violence and the role love, dependence, and fear play in battered

> women's decision making. Examining the heart of intimate abuse also requires an analysis of culture and race and the ways both form our views on relationship and commitment (Mills 1998: 21).

Therefore, it may not be strictly true that an abused woman *allows* the abuse to continue. There are certainly many complex reasons why battered women stay in abusive relationships. Ellard, Herbert and Thompson (1991) suggest that women stay in abusive relationships partly because they are emotionally attached to the relationship. They may also believe that the abusive element is not characteristic of the "real" partner they married and continue to entertain the hope that the abusive man may change. To complicate things, it is not inconceivable that this may happen: that an abusive man might change. It is not true in all cases that violence *always* gets worse (cf. Gelles 2017; Feld and Straus, 1989). Economic, financial, social, cultural, and religious reasons, fear of retaliation, the presence of children, and other reasons may contribute to a woman staying in an intolerable situation. Gloria, as we will see, had already seen a previous marriage fail. Certainly, women face many impossible decisions and contemplate various courses of action. Violence and love may traverse each other in complex, ineffable ways. As we shall see, the tension between violence and intimacy affected Gloria too, and made her put up with violence and insults longer than she should have.

A feminist reading of power in relationships will be elemental in unearthing this conundrum that women find themselves in when they are abused by someone who is close to them, someone who they love, and someone who may seem to be a "nice" or "good" person. It may be imperative to reflect, more and more, on the gendered structure of power. As Mills (1998: 10) points out, violence occurs in the context of asymmetrical power relations between men and women in the family and is reflected in inequality evident in society at large. The point to be made here is that the presence of intimacy does not mean that there will not be "gender trouble" in relationships. Indeed, central to understanding intimate partner violence is the fact that couples may (claim to) "love" each other in the midst of abuse. Love and trouble are not necessarily incompatible, but, as noted, may *traverse* each other. Indeed, as we shall see, it may be "intimacy" that feeds Obakeng's appetite for control and domination.

Jordan et al. (2004) note the incidence of unpredictable juxtaposition of physical violence and psychological abuse with loving behaviours. What Chase and Levenson (2000: 12) call “domestic failure” may not be for lack of intimacy. It may even be *because* of it. It may be intimacy that confers power on some abusers. Thus, we need ways to distinguish between what Mills (1998: 4) calls “healthy and unhealthy modes of intimate interaction”. I would add that we need to distinguish not just between “healthy and unhealthy modes of intimate interaction” but also between what I would call superficial (or shallow or skin deep) intimacy and deep intimacy. Superficial intimacy is akin to love at first sight without such love being tested. Deep intimacy, on the other hand, is when the bond of love is tested and manages to hold out. Others could call this “true love”.

Fig 5.12: In the episode when Gloria and Obakeng tie the knot, the producers pose the following question to audiences: “has Gloria finally found happiness?”

Certainly, Gloria and Obakeng’s relationship starts with signs that it was a “healthy mode of interaction”. After tying the knot, the two immediately plan their wedding. This is a sign that they were madly in love. When he “pops” the question to Gloria at the Christmas Day party at Maletsatsi’s, a nervous Obakeng got down on one knee before all the people who were there and said, “Gloria my love, I haven’t known you for long but I do know one thing, I love you and I can’t spend another day without you. You complete me. I’m not a young man anymore; I don’t have time for games. I want you to be mine forever.” He told Gloria that she was his “soul mate” and that he wants to

spend the rest of his life with her. The act of going down on his knee and "popping the question" in front of the whole community despite his nervousness has a touch of chivalry and romance about it.

Fig 5.13: Gloria and Obakeng's "special" wedding (Source: Screenshot: etv.co.za)

The speech itself is not only touching, but is reflective of a particular mode of intimacy, especially the use of phrases such as "I love you and I can't spend another day without you", "You complete me", "soulmate", and "I want you to be mine forever". A soulmate emerges only in the context of deep intimacy. The fact that he says "I don't have time for games" suggests that he is serious.

At the same time, this speech may be considered clichéd, and contains seeds of what could be construed as rushing into a union without really getting to a deep understanding of each other. The statement "Gloria my love, I haven't known you for long but I do know one thing, I love you and I can't spend another day without you. You complete me" is very problematic. In it, Obakeng admits that he has not known

Gloria for that long. However, he still goes on to tell her that he loves her, that he cannot live without her, and that she completes him. How can you love someone you have not known for long? How can you claim to be unable to live with someone you have only just met? How can you claim to be "completed" by a virtual stranger? How can a virtual stranger be also a soulmate? All this does not bode well.

Basically, one way to see Gloria and Obakeng's quick marriage and wedding is to consider it as a form of superficial intimacy. Such rushed marriages may result in things falling apart as the couple moves from superficial intimacy to a deeper intimacy. Indeed, the failure to cultivate a deeper intimacy may result in the falling out that brings with it intimate partner violence. The marriage vows and the glossy wedding paper over the cracks that expose the lack of true intimacy in the relationship. A few months after the wedding, Gloria suspects Obakeng is cheating on her and starts to tail and investigate him. She finds out, however, that the "mistress" is actually Obakeng's mother. Obakeng is intentionally sneaking out to see his mother because he does not want to inflame the tensions between the two women in his life. There seems to be little trust between husband and wife, although the two do appear to love each other genuinely. But what is love without trust? There are secrets galore between the two. *Scandal*'s producers tended to frame the union between the two as Gloria's search for true love. In the episode where the two tie the knot, the producers ask the audience: "has Gloria finally found happiness?" They answer in the affirmative, stating in the episode on 9th January 2014 that "Gloria finds Mr. Right". In hindsight, we know that the marriage falls apart due to domestic violence, and that Obakeng is no Mr. Right.

Fig 5.14: A collage of Gloria and Obakeng's "special" wedding (Source: Screenshot: etv.co.za)

The gradual breakdown of the marriage itself is replete with insight into the individual, couple-level, and social factors that cause intimate partner violence. Some of these factors have been discussed in Chapter 1 and 2. Evidence that the relationship might have been rushed without establishing proper bases for intimacy is provided by the fact that, when the abuse begins, Gloria manages to uncover important information about Obakeng. She finds that the real reason he had separated from his first wife

was because he abused her. His abuse of Gloria was thus not the first time. Had Gloria known this information before marriage and before the wedding, it is likely that her reaction to his proposal would have been markedly different. Basically, Gloria married a stranger. There can be no intimacy between strangers.

The wedding that follows the tying of the knot suggests that Gloria has indeed found happiness. It is a glossy wedding which brings together the whole township community (see collage in Fig 20 above). Gloria and Obakeng duly exchange vows, promising to love and care for each other forever and ever. Gloria says:

> This is the beginning of a new chapter in my life with a man who truly loves me, a man who puts me first in his life. The next twenty years are going to be great; more loving and getting to know each other. I'm looking forward to a life with someone who is spontaneous, something which is different to what I'm used to. It's all I've ever dreamed of and wished for. I'm getting married to the sweetest and most loving man I know.

These gushing words suggest that Gloria was truly in love, and that the intimacy she shared with Obakeng was – at least from her side – genuine. If she had harboured any doubts, she would have said so. In the confession of love above, there is no hint whatsoever about any doubt.

The fact that Gloria describes Obakeng as "a man who truly loves me, a man who puts me first in his life" suggests that we should apply the framework of "true love" or deep intimacy to them. Gloria states that she has high hopes for her marriage to Obakeng, seeing herself living with him for "the next twenty years", which she says, "are going to be great; more loving and getting to know each other". Gloria also fought hard to get Gontse's blessing, since her daughter had made it clear from the beginning that she did not trust Obakeng. Likewise, Obakeng's actions in trying to get his mother's reluctant blessing for his wedding with Gloria, and his final act of choosing his wife over his mother – and going ahead with the wedding with or without his mother's blessing, and with or without her attendance – shows commitment to his newfound love.

Nevertheless, as I have argued above, there are legitimate questions whether a wedding and exchanging vows, a honeymoon, as well as the initial explosion of joy, translates to deeper intimacy and true love. The fact that Gloria and Obakeng's marriage falls apart in the same year in which they are married suggests that the show of love in the earlier phase might not have been deep enough to sustain a fulfilling and long marriage. Even the fact that Gloria describes Obakeng as a "a man who truly loves me, a man who puts me first in his life" does not in and of itself make it self-evident that he truly loves her, that he puts her first in his life, or that there is true love or deep intimacy between them. It takes more than words to establish deep intimacy. Indeed, there are already signs that all might not be well or, at least, that all will not be well for the lovebirds. This is because the period between tying of the knot and the wedding is filled with hiccups and "drama". As Gloria herself states in Fig 21 below, "My wedding has finally arrived despite all the drama."

Fig 5.15: The wedding provides a foretaste of the "drama" to come (Source: Screenshot: etv.co.za)

The drama partly involves Obakeng's mother, who does not like Gloria. Indeed, the wedding is – for a time – in doubt. In the end the mother-in-law withholds her blessings from the new couple and refuses to attend the wedding at all. The drama also involves Abel, Gloria's eloped former husband, who appears from the blue to fight for her. Gloria is caught in between Abel and Obakeng. Abel is the father to her children, and thus

cannot be cast away easily. In the end, Gloria chooses Obakeng. This is an important element in our discussion as it establishes the context of marital love and the abuse that attends it.

How could someone whom you chose over another man abuse and mistreat you? It could be said that Gloria's decision to choose Obakeng over Abel shows that she really loves him, and that their relationship had the makings of a successful marriage. Further causing the drama was the fact that the *lobola* negotiations did not go as Gloria planned, monetary wise. Finally, Gloria's daughter, Gontse, is opposed to her mother dating anyone at all. Gontse is displeased that her mother turned down the option to reconcile with her father, Abel, and chose instead to marry Obakeng. Apart from continuing to harbour the hope that Gloria will reconcile with Abel, Gontse has a lingering suspicion that Obakeng is not everything that he says he is. Interestingly, she is proven right in the end when the abuse occurs.

The poor relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law eventually becomes one of the causes of the strain between husband and wife. This conflict reflects individual and couple-level predictors of intimate partner violence. There is, for instance, evidence of traditional gender ideologies at play at both individual and couple level (cf. Sugarman and Frankel, 1996; LiYount and Li, 2009), which cause the mother-in-law to interfere in her son's marriage. As the marriage progresses, there is evidence of other predictors such as age (cf. DeMaris, Benson, Fox, Hill, and Van Wyk, 2003; Yount, 2005), socioeconomic status (cf. Lockhart, 1987; Yount, 2005), employment and educational attainment (cf. MacMillian and Gartner, 1999), relationship or marital status (cf. Yllo and Straus, 1981), relationship duration (cf. DeMaris et al., 2003), children in the household (cf. DeMaris et al., 2003; Yount, 2005), and employment dynamics between partners (e.g., MacMillian and Gartner, 1999).

There is, however, still yet another critical view that is consistent with our earlier views above – a view that does not just admit a hard binary between shallow love and deep love. Rather, this is a view that encourages us to see relationships as complex, and the causes and consequences of gender violence and domestic abuse as complicated; it encourages us to see the scope of relationships – whether such relationships succeed or fail – as containing room for *second thoughts*. The notion of

second thoughts, as argued earlier, points to someone like Gloria as having agency and subjectivity. She is not an empty vessel but, rather, someone who pauses to think and reflect on what is going on in her life with Obakeng, and she weighs many different options. She is faced by many imponderables, largely brought about by the fact that she shares a hard-to-measure degree of intimacy with her abuser-to-be. After all, she is the one who, on the eve of the wedding, gushes:

> *I can finally breathe because my husband-to-be chose me over his mother who's been against our marriage from the onset. I finally get to wear that white dress I've longed for. I mean really I've been with Abel for 20 years and he never bothered to pay lobola, at the very least. OMG I feel so alive, wanted, and loved. I feel so young again! I want to see his face when he sees me in my wedding gown. He makes me feel sexy and desired. I don't remember when last a man looked at me in that way.*

We have argued that domestic violence is complicated by this intimacy. This is part of what Mills (1998: 6) calls "the dynamics of domestic violence". Mills says that at the heart of intimate abuse are the dynamics of domestic violence which incorporate the role that love, dependence, and fear may play in battered women's decision making. For Gloria, abuse is intertwined with intimacy, thus complicating her thinking and decision. The fact that she appears to hesitate to walk away certainly implies that she is thinking about what it *means* to walk away.

Relationships are never transparent. In the quote above, Gloria shows that things are more complicated than they seem on the surface. For instance, she clearly respects Obakeng for choosing her over his mother. It was not an easy step for Obakeng to take, and it is not a fact that he *did* choose Gloria over his mother who he loved and respected. What does this mean to Gloria? Further, Gloria also loves Obakeng for giving her what Abel never gave her. She says, for instance, that Abel never paid *lobola* for her, and yet Obakeng did. She says that Obakeng makes her "feel so alive, wanted, and loved". "I feel so young again!" she beams. The climax are the words "I want to see his face when he sees me in my wedding gown. He makes me feel sexy and desired. I don't remember when last a man looked at me in that way." These are not just idle words, spoken superficially. These are, rather, words spoken from the deepest part of a woman's heart. She seems absolutely sincere. Why should we

begrudge her this feeling, just because Obakeng later abuses her? Just because Obakeng abuses her does not make these feelings any less real. As Ellard, Herbert and Thompson (1991) suggest women stay in abusive relationships partly because they are emotionally attached to the relationship. Gloria's marriage to Abel had become sterile and had ended with Abel cheating on her and walking out on her. She would have stayed in this marriage for the sake of the children and because she did not see it fit to walk out on Abel. There is thus some truth to the claim that Obakeng made Gloria "feel so alive, wanted, and loved". She does not seem to be pretending that he made her "feel so young again!"

For Mills (1998), examining the heart of intimate abuse requires an analysis of the ways our views on relationships and commitment are formed. The fact that Gloria had been married to Abel for 20 years further complicates the transparency of her decision to leave or stay. We do not just walk away from people we have shared the same intimate spaces and selves for two decades. Certainly, it is not an easy step. And, as we argued earlier, it may not be strictly true that Gloria *allowed* the abuse to continue. Rather, there are many complex reasons why she stayed in an abusive relationship for as long as she did. Gloria might, for instance, have believed that the abusive element in her marriage to Obakeng might not be characteristic of the "true" Obakeng who went on his bended knee to propose to her, who said to her "Gloria my love, I haven't known you for long but I do know one thing, I love you and I can't spend another day without you. You complete me. I'm not a young man anymore; I don't have time for games. I want you to be mine forever," and who chose her over his mother and made her "feel so alive, wanted, and loved", and "so young again!"

Basically, it is possible that Gloria might have continued to entertain the hope that Obakeng may change. As noted, it is not inconceivable that Obakeng could have changed for the better. Abusive men can change. Certainly, it is not true in all cases that the violence *always* gets worse (cf. Gelles 2017; Feld and Straus, 1989). Gloria, who had already seen a previous marriage fail, who had been cheated on and seen Abel walk out on her, faced many imponderables. It is possible that she contemplated various courses of action. The point to be emphasised here is that in Gloria and Obakeng's relationship violence and love *traverse* each other in complex, ineffable

ways. The tension between violence and intimacy appears to have affected Gloria and made her put up with violence and insults longer than she should have.

As already pointed out, a feminist reading of power in relationships could be elemental in unearthing the conundrum that Gloria found herself in when she was continually abused by someone who was close to her, someone she loved, and considered the first man to have made her feel sexy, young and loved. How do you just walk away on someone who makes you feel sexy, young and loved? Certainly, it is easy to judge from a distance, from outside the circle of intimacy that envelopes couples. At the same time, we remain cognisant that the fact that Obakeng made Gloria feel sexy, young and loved does not mean that there was not going to be "gender trouble" in their marriage. To the contrary, abuse does not preclude romance or intimacy. Intimacy, also, does not precluded abuse. As noted, central to understanding intimate partner violence is the fact that couples may (claim to) "love" each other in the midst of abuse. Love and trouble are not necessarily incompatible, but, as noted, may *traverse* each other. This *traversal* property is central to this study. Are audiences on social media aware of this *traversality*?

5.5 Synopsis of selected episodes

The abuse begins. Mostly it took the form of psychological abuse. Obakeng attacked Gloria's self-esteem and confidence by constantly denigrating her. She can never do right in his sight. In this episode, he rejected a birthday present that Gloria had thoughtfully prepared for him. Gloria had wanted to please him by taking pictures of

herself in a low-cut dress that she assumed would be “sexy”. She had asked female workmate, Anzani (played by Fulu Mugovhani), a photographer, to take the photographs. When she presented the pictures to Obakeng, his reaction took her - and viewers – by complete surprise. He was angry at his wife’s gesture. His immediate reaction was not one of pleasure or titillation but to ask Gloria who had taken the photos, and where they had been taken. Gloria tried to reassure him about the identity of the person who had taken the photos; she also told him the pictures had been taken from Newtonian, a local hotel. Obakeng was visibly unimpressed. He expressed his concern about his wife walking at the Newtonian dressed in a low-cut dress. He “accused” her of vainly trying to look young, when it was clear to him that she was no longer young. Sensing his wife’s disappointment, he mouthed a grudging apology and a “thank you”. Gloria’s mood, however, was already dampened. This was a sign of creeping tension in the relationship.

Despite this, Gloria throws Obakeng a surprise birthday party. Again, he reacts negatively. Although he appears to appreciate the gesture, he is upset to see a male, Ndumiso (played by Andile Sithole), in the house. Ndumiso (or Ndu) had been helping Gloria with the preparations for the party. Trying to assuage Obakeng’s hurt feelings, Gloria explains that Ndu, who is a barman at the Newtonian, had given them a discount for the booze. Obakeng, however, is still not pleased. His mood becomes worse when he learns that Gloria’s friends and neighbours were also invited to the party. He tells her in no uncertain terms that he does not approve of her friends and neighbours, stating that her friends arenot his friends. There is one particular friend of Gloria’s that he expresses great antipathy for – Maletsatsi (played by Joyce Skefu). He tells Gloria that he does not like her friend and is finding it difficult to warm up to her. Interestingly, Maletsatsi is one of Gloria’s closest friends. Obakeng also complains about Ndu, whom he perceives to be a sot and queries that he is now being forced to spend money on what he terms “Abel’s friends”.

One reason Obakeng is so upset is his wife’s extravagance. He has run out of means to get her to observe some frugality and is constantly aware of the precarity of their financial situation. Obakeng is of the view that they should have spent the birthday alone and wants his wife to dump her friends. Gloria is shocked into silence at such erratic behaviour. Obakeng, again, later seems contrite and apologises. Gloria

appears to have decided to overlook the abuse and name-calling that was creeping into the relationship and becoming habitual because Obakeng continued to apologise and plead with her. Furthermore, she also blames herself for the abuse as she feels that she is up to no good. For instance, she had tricked Abel, her ex-husband, into giving her the money for the surprise birthday party. She thus feels that she deserves the blowback.

Gloria tries to mend relations with her mother-in-law, with some success. She takes this opportunity to confide in Obakeng's mother about his erratic behaviour and escalating abuse. She reveals to her that she had stumbled upon some troubling information that Obakeng had also abused his ex-wife, the previous Mrs Rangaka. This was the real reason his first marriage had collapsed, not what he had told Gloria; that his first wife disrespected him. Indeed, he had suggested to Gloria that he was a victim of psychological abuse from his first wife. There was, of course, little truth to this. Lamia (2013) states that:

> A negative attachment with an old partner may interfere with the attachment to a new one, as well as put a current partner in the uncomfortable position of competing with the ghost of what remains of the past relationship and wondering if the new partner's interest in, or excitement about, the new relationship is enough to provide fulfilment.[34]

[34] Lamia, M.C. (2013). "Rebound relationships", https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/201309/rebound-relationships

Obakeng's mother, who did not know about this history, tries to broach the subject with her son. Seeing a pattern in his behaviour and in his relations with women, she requests him to seek help. However, Obakeng loses his temper with both his wife and his mother. Unable to stomach his mother's admonitions, he throws her out of the house. Gloria, unaware of what had transpired, comes home from a New Year's Eve party that had been organised by her friends and neighbours. She finds Obakeng waiting for her. He is seething with anger due to the episode with his mother. He is verbally abusive and engages in belittling name calling. He angrily accuses Gloria of feeding lies to his mother and intimates that she may be trying to turn mother against son. Gloria is horrified and frightened out of her wits. Seeing that he is so angry, she can hardly defend herself against the torrent of verbal abuse. She tries, instead, to calm him down and placate him. She also appears to believe that if she accepts all the blame, Obakeng would calm down. Finally, she feels that she is also culpable in the abuse since she is not a "perfect wife" to Obakeng. For instance, she knows that Obakeng is right about her spendthrift ways. Gloria's extravagance exasperates her husband. She is always spending money on what he considers to be fripperies and trinkets – such as the over-the-top wedding that they could scarcely afford, and the fancy decorations for the house. The tripe nights seem to be the last straw. Gloria thus feels she could do better – if she tried harder to be a better wife, perhaps he would not be so angry.

In this episode Obakeng arrives home from work. He finds the home space buzzing with activity, loud music playing. Drinks are flowing. Gloria is hosting a raucous "tripe night", despite Obakeng previously prohibiting her from doing so. Tripe nights are popular in the township, and help women raise additional income. Everyone at the party seems to be having a great time, except Obakeng, who reacts with what has

now become customary dis-ease. Things come to a head when Obakeng observes some township men, tipsy from all the drinking, flirting with Gloria. He looks on in horror but is unable to act in the full glare of the community. He waits until the party has come to an end. After the guests have left, he confronts Gloria, demanding answers. He wants to know why she disrespected his advice to discontinue the “tripe nights”. What other shady things will she be up to in his absence? Obakeng further informs Gloria that he had seen her daughter, Gontse, driving off with Ndu. Obakeng labels Gontse a slut and adds that “she learnt it from her mother”.

Gloria, for once, gets angry. She talks back. She tells Obakeng that she does not accept his mentioning of her daughter in a disparaging way. Obakeng retaliates by threatening to sell the house. Gloria objects, and says to him: “You will do no such thing. This is my house!”. This is too much for Obakeng, who slaps Gloria hard across the face, and hurts her rather badly. He then warns her not to push his buttons any further. This is a first for Gloria; she never expected that a man would hit her, more so one she loved. She does not scream or run to the neighbours but decides to bear the violence. She does not want people to know what is going on, as she is flush with shame and fear.

Fig 5.16: Obakeng slaps Gloria (Source: screenshot by author)

Obakeng, who seems to realise what he has done, begs Gloria not to tell people about the real cause of her injuries. When she calls the police on him, he instructs her to lie to them about the abuse, and instead say that she was the victim of an accidental fall. She obliges. Obakeng also goes ahead with the process of trying to sell the house, despite Gloria's objections and despite the house not belonging to him. The issue of the house is central to the abuse, since Obakeng feels emasculated by living in his wife's house. Selling it is his way of being even. At the same time, although he often says sorry, Obakeng also feels that he is right to abuse Gloria in order to make her more loyal and submissive.

Gloria keeps the information of the escalating abuse to herself. She seems to believe that Obakeng would change for the better, or else blames herself for the fact that she is not a "perfect wife". The fact that Obakeng sometimes becomes contrite and apologises gives her hope that he might change for the better. After hitting her, he says he is sorry and promises never to do it again. Gloria also shudders to think what will happen when the community of Soweto hears that she is being abused after such a splendid wedding. She prefers that everyone mind their own business. Her excessive pride makes her refuse to admit the severity of the abuse or take offers of help.

Fig 5.17: Gloria's bruised and battered face (Source: screenshot by author)

Finally, she knows that Obakeng wants her to be submissive and loyal. She thus blames herself for her disloyalty and lack of submissiveness. She wishes she were more submissive and loyal, and then perhaps the abuse would stop. She remembers, for instance, the incident when she wrongly suspected Obakeng of having a mistress when, in reality, he was only sneaking out to be with his mother.

Gloria thus feels culpable and elects to sweep her domestic troubles under the carpet rather than risk stigma and public ridicule. Indeed, she continues to treat Obakeng as she had during the full-blown romance of the first days. However, Obakeng no longer reciprocates. He continues the name calling, and completely treats Gloria like a child. For instance, he tells her “Stop whatever you are doing and go to bed”. She obliges unquestioningly. She is no longer the bubbly and larger than life character of old, but is now subdued, withdrawn and sad. When Maletsatsi starts to suspect that Gloria’s injuries and unhappy moods might be due to domestic abuse, Gloria conceals everything and continues to defend Obakeng, claiming he is still the sweet and romantic man that she married. In order to prevent any information of the abuse leaking out, Gloria starts avoiding contact with friends, neighbours and other people close to her such as her children. Interestingly, the moment the abuse became physical seems to have been the day Gloria really discovered that she was in the middle of full-blown domestic abuse. Before being hit, she had only seen Obakeng’s transgressions as minor temper tantrums that would eventually go away.

Having discovered for the first time that she was a bona fide victim of domestic abuse, via the “epiphany” of the first slap, Gloria gradually starts to fight back. For instance,

she has been going behind Obakeng's back, since he hit her and started the process of putting up the house for sale, to block the potential sale. However, she is still not thinking clearly about what is going on in her life. Obakeng hit her again and again, until she called the police on him. He however manages to convince Gloria to conceal what is really going on. Therefore, although Gloria confides to Maletsatsi about the abuse and calls the police on Obakeng, she still remains ambivalent, and wants the whole matter to remain a secret. She continues to pretend that all is well in her marriage, to shield the abuser, and to conceal what is really going on from her children, friends and neighbours. At this stage, the people around no longer suspect that she is being abused: they now know it. There are offers to help, but Gloria dithers. She does not want trouble, and she resents the interference.

By now the whole community in Soweto has become aware that Gloria is being abused. However, her smiles and ambivalence constrain neighbours from taking any action. Furthermore, Gloria does not want anyone to cause problems in her marriage by interfering. She also believes Obakeng's apology and promise from the last episode of abuse that he will not do it again. However, the abuse does not let up. Because no one opposes him, Obakeng gets into a habit of abusing Gloria at every turn. Her life has become a living hell. Complicating the abuse is not only the fact that Gloria blames herself, that she is proud, trapped, or that she never expected a toxic relationship. Rather, it is also that Gloria appears to genuinely love Obakeng, and that part of her even appreciates his possessiveness. Certainly, she sees in a jealous Obakeng something that she never saw in Abel. To her, a possessive husband will not cheat like Abel. However, as we noted, the physical abuse marks the turning point.

When Obakeng finds out that Zinzile, Gloria's neighbour, had been assisting Gloria with the cooking, he gets angry and tells Gloria that he feels deeply disrespected. He tells her that a proper wife cooked meals for her husband instead of outsourcing this duty. At this stage, the community decides to act. The men of Soweto take drastic action and manhandle Obakeng, who is arrested and sent to prison. He phones Gloria from his jail cell and pleads with her to testify in his favour. She refuses. Escalation of the abuse thus happens not only because of inaction from both Gloria's side and the community's side, but because the abuse happened to act like a slow poison and has many levels. It took the escalation to physical abuse for it to reach a turning point.

The cycle of violence follows a pattern more or less in this form: an incident occurs that builds tension and an argument ensues; it is followed by the abusive stage which is verbal, emotional, physical or sexual. This stage can last for minutes or days. After the abusive stage comes a honeymoon stage where the abuser apologises, proclaims love, buys gifts and promises not to do it again. As the relationship progresses, the abuse gets worse, and the intervals shorter and do not progress to honeymoon stage anymore. The abuser no longer apologises or cares. Some unlucky women never go past the last abusive stage; they end up dead. Some are killed the moment they decide to end the relationship (Ackroyd 2015). By refusing to open the door for Obakeng when he came home in a murderous mood pretending to want to apologise, Gloria probably escaped death by the whisker. Gelles (2017: 20) opines that "physical violence is the ultimate resource that can be utilized to hold subordinate groups in place."

Kelly and Radford (1996) noted that some women tended to rationalise, trivialise and minimise their abuse, often saying "but nothing really happened" or "but nothing actually happened" after abusive comments/threats, unwanted physical contact, attempted or actual sexual assault. It is a worryingly common behaviour for some women to initially, or even permanently, accept abuse. For some reason, some abused women feel that "it can't be that bad". At the same time, they are complicating factors that prevent abused women from leaving such as lack of financial means, isolation (such as the abuser preventing her from seeing other people), threats to harm people she cares for, and the community refusing to believe her. There is also the fear of the unknown, such as the fear that the man will kill her if she leaves; numbness and paralysis; and low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness. Hooks (1992:7) even suggests, worryingly, that when a woman perseveres in an oppressive situation, it may be because she is used to being oppressed. She warns that to be strong in the face of oppression is not the same as overcoming oppression. Apparently, black women are socialised or conditioned to "adjust, adapt and cope".

Societal factors, such as shame, stigma and embarrassment, the presence of children, and the need to protect the partner, may prevent the victim from leaving. There are also complex emotional factors that come into play, such as "love" for the abuser, or the belief that he will change if she stays and tries hard enough. Gloria for a long time

overlooked and underplayed the psychological abuse meted on her by Obakeng. The depression and post-traumatic stress she experienced did not seem to her to count as domestic violence. Poet, author and activist, Maya Angelou, who had suffered domestic abuse, points out some of the emotional traumas victims triggered by domestic violence which victims may have to live with: depression; anxiety; panic attacks; substance abuse; and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which can lead to suicide attempts, psychotic episodes, and even homelessness.[35] Gloria "solves" the problem by keeping away from and avoiding her close friends and neighbours. She wanted to keep the abuse a secret at all costs. At work is the paralysis brought on by stigma that Pizzey (1974) wrote of in her book on partner abuse, *Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear*. Gloria was certainly attempting to scream quietly so that the people of Soweto would not hear. Even Obakeng complaining about Gloria's friends was a way of isolating her. She was also paralysed by fear of the social stigma of not being married, and the fear of being alone. Certainly, there is a case that can be made for arguing that Gloria was paralysed by a fear of being without a partner.

Obakeng's controlling, domineering and manipulative behaviours appear to arise from many sources. Partly, he is jealous and paranoid. He is jealous and paranoid because he does not trust his wife. He does not trust his wife because, although they love each other, they are both strangers at the level of intimacy. Another reason for Obakeng's controlling, abusive nature is that he is a conservative man, who resents being married to an independent, ambitious woman. He prefers Gloria to be loyal and submissive. His insecurities, however, also show another side to Obakeng. He is not just a victim of passion. By not wanting his wife to make some money for herself by way of the tripe nights, and by wanting to sell the house, he is selfish and insensitive. His behaviour in belittling his wife and treating her like a child shows the other side of his nature. He seems deliberately controlling and manipulative.

Finally, Obakeng is a chameleon. Although he played the charmer in the early days of his relationship with Gloria, research into his previous marriage shows that he has a history of intimate partner abuse. A leopard does not change its spots. It is not clear,

[35] Children exposed to domestic violence are also at risk for developmental problems, psychiatric disorders, school difficulties, aggressive behaviour, and low self-esteem (Scutti 2013).

however, to what extent he is in control of his actions. On one level, although he seems to realise that what he is doing to Gloria is wrong, it seems he cannot stop himself. Throughout the abuse, Obakeng would still call Gloria his “Sunflower”. He seems as much trapped as Gloria, or at least incapable of seeing himself self-reflexively as an abuser. Unfortunately, the producers of *Scandal* did not explain exactly what (the source of) Obakeng’s problem was, or how an abuser like him could be rehabilitated. On another level, however, Obakeng’s actions betray agency and culpability. His ability to manipulate Gloria to lie to the police and to her children and neighbours, and his lying about his previous relationship, suggests that he knows what he is doing.

5.6 Framing the Findings

The findings in relation to how social media audiences chatted and “talked” about gender violence relate specifically to a number of “awarenesses”, such as the awareness of the complex nature of gender violence; awareness of Obakeng as an abusive partner; awareness of stages of abuse; awareness of the nature of violence and control; awareness of “representation tensions”; and awareness of Gloria’s predicament, and of Gloria as the victim of abuse. Are audiences aware of the multiform nature of gender violence? Is there an awareness of the different types of intimate partner violence? Are audiences aware of the nature of the abusive personality? Could they see the profile of an abusive partner in Obakeng? How is awareness of masculinity and patriarchy offerered in the social media talk. Why does Gloria not press charges? Why does she not say: “enough is enough”? Why does she not seek help immediately? Why is it not easy to break silence? What is behind the passive acceptance of abuse? Considering the fragmentary nature of social media talk, how informed is the “debate” on the subject as a whole?

The final issue in terms of awareness concerns whether audiences are aware of Gloria’s role as a victim. What is the audience’s understanding of (the toll of) trauma and survival? Is the audience aware of the double-consciousness that Gloria has to develop in order to pretend that all is well? What of the fear of communal backlash for outing Obakeng as an abuser? I also studied the nature of the “talk” itself in terms of style and “expression”. For instance, some commented at length, while some did so only in monosyllables. Some just “liked” the page or “loved” it, while others responded through a variety of emojis.

The “Last Night on *Scandal*” teasers that were used by the soap opera’s producers to provoke talk do not just touch the Gloria/Obakeng story line but include other narratives which are running concurrently with the violence against Gloria episodes. The conversations oscillate between these story lines, although this study confines itself to the narrative about Gloria’s abuse. Other story lines on *Scandal* also depict some violence against women, albeit not similar from the one that Gloria is facing. One is being victimised and tormented by her husband’s half- brother who seems to have been going through psychological issues resulting from his violent upbringing. Another is portrayed as a psychopath because she mercilessly manipulates her husband, using lies, cheating and plotting murder as some of her tactics. The other is a jail bird and dysfunctional mother fighting for her release from prison. Yet another is a young mother who has just given up her baby for adoption and faces alienation from her family. This young mother’s only concern, however, is to marry a rich man.

The comments, it was observed, generally exhibit a zero tolerance for violence against women. The abuse of women is regarded as a “no-no”. There is no open support of Obakeng’s actions, particularly when his actions escalate to physical violence. Obakeng comes out clearly as the pantomime villain in most of the comments. Such a reading would be a form of preferred or dominant decoding, since this is also the reading of Obakeng that is consistent with the needs of *Scandal*’s producers in as far as the 16 Days of Activism are concerned. The producers certainly wanted Obakeng to be seen unambiguously as the aggressor and Gloria as the victim. They also wanted audiences to condemn domestic abuse in no uncertain terms. These outcomes are by and large realised. As Gerraghty (2001:17) argues, soap operas provide stories which engage an audience in such a way that they become the “subject for public interest and interrogation”. The direction and flow of talk focused on domestic violence by men against women, since the *Scandal* episodes in question arethemselves intended to present a picture in which men commit violence against women, and not the other way round. By putting a spotlight on violence against women, *Scandal* prioritises and makes the “feminist position” (or at least the UN-gender rights position) a central rallying point. This is a huge difference from the days when soap operas positioned women only as objects of the male gaze.

I thus observed elicitation of participation via the medium of the soap opera, but also via the social media platform. In as far as the "edutainment" needs of *Scandal* were concerned, the Facebook platform served as an educational forum and public sphere. Habermas defines the notion of public as "when its open to all" (Fuchs 2013:218). He, therefore, sees the important dimensions of the public sphere as formation of public opinion where all citizens have access and thus have freedoms among them freedom of expression (Haberman 1989b, 136). However, the criticism of this concept is that it ignores that not everyone has access which is true of this study as access to Facebook is limited according to Internet connectivity and upon accepting Facebook's controversial Terms and Conditions and the Privacy Policy (see Chapter 5.21). From a feminist point of view the public sphere according to Fuchs (2013:219) "has been a sphere of educated, rich men whereas the private sphere is viewed as the domain of women" as we shall read about later.

Despite the weaknesses of the public sphere, this study reveals that it is somewhat a public sphere although I vaguely saw feminist ideas and thinking around violence against women circulating. I say vaguely feminist because there is no clear articulation of normative feminism in the comments. If feminism resonates more in the academe,[36] it may have doubtful appeal on ephemeral social media threads, and in relation to poor women cleaners from the township like Gloria. There is not a single explicit observed mention of the word "feminism", or explicit articulation of feminist ideas. Rather, the threads tend to reflect what I regard as feminist-lite orientations and positioning on the question of the representation of gender violence. The attitude that women's lives, as with men's, matter and are important (Reinharz 1992) was clearly expressed. What emerges, therefore, is a tendency to talk repeatedly about violence in relation to gender.

Abstract references to "men" and "women" are in abundance. This, I would argue, shows that social media talk can be explicitly gendered, just as much as it can be racialised or reflect class or ethnicity. It is probable that it was mainly women watching and commenting about Gloria. At least, the literature suggests that soap opera

[36] Research has shown that feminism has evolved largely because of education (cf. Gambaudo 2007: 95).

audiences are still predominantly female (Brunsdon 2000:29). Certainly, there is evidence of emerging identity politics on social media. Such identity politics are heavily inflected as online identities, although with indications that audiences also constantly enrich online threads by referring to their experiences in real world "offline" settings. Comments such as "Women hide pain and protect abusers from being punished", "I dislike being a woman because women allow abuse to go on and on", and "It's hard to be women" are drawn, for instance, from what I assume was the commenter's "outside".

But do audiences show an awareness of the complexity of domestic abuse? I noted that there is much frustration at Gloria's own ambivalent behaviour and the sense that she is a "weak victim". Gloria's name is mentioned a total of 215 times in the threads, while that of Obakeng is mentioned 105 times. Gloria's ambivalence and "split personality" (she is seen as dithering and as not knowing what she really wants) left many of the commenters "split". The "weakening" of Gloria is noted by most commenters and is attributed to the fiddling of the producers of *Scandal* in trying to create a character who could be bullied and abused in order to show how bad gender violence is. This strategy, however, is regarded as reinforcing the stereotype that women are not assertive, and are weak, passive and yield to power. Ayiera (2010:12) fears such a "categorisation normalises the notion of women lacking agency and in need of protection".

Many wondered why Gloria did not leave or act decisively against Obakeng early on. However, other commenters relate to that "split personality" and to the "dithering" and paralysed behaviour, saying that it is not always so easy to "get out". Others also remind their interlocutors that violence against women is a complex issue that defies straightforward answers. At any rate, soap operas need not necessarily proceed according to laws of chronological unfolding that we perhaps see in our daily lives. It could also be contested that the idea to portray Gloria as weak could have been merely to mirror reality of what goes on in many South African homes. Perhaps this is what, from a point of view of representation, Porter (1977) observed as the function of soap operas: "solutions to the problems posed by soap operas are of such a kind that they are themselves generative of further problems".

It is possible that Gloria is genuinely paralysed and trapped by the abuse, such that she is unable to get out. As one commenter on the thread stated, “abusers hit you again and again then apologise”. Acknowledging the repetitive and cyclic peaks and troughs of abuse is important: the abuse gets worse incrementally, and sometimes it is too late. Note that Gloria only “notices” that she is a victim of abuse when the violence becomes physical. Before that, the immediate tendency is for the woman to rationalise the abuse or to blame herself. A commenter puts it succinctly when she states that “Obakeng wants Gloria to feel it’s her fault when he beat her.” The general attitude towards Gloria at times seems to me to reflect a tendency to blame the victim, or to blame the producers for watering down Gloria’s character in order to make a point. Some commenters, for instance, speculate about the extent to which Gloria provokes her husband. For instance, some commenters accuse Gloria of acting like a “prostitute” by holding tripe nights and flirting with other men though she is a married woman. Some think she provoked and “pushed” Obakeng to beat her up, or that she asked for it. Hence comments such as “I understand where he is coming from”.

But should there be an excuse for abuse? Feminist critiques unanimously show that the abuser is the only person sorely responsible for the abuse and the only one who can stop it. A feminist-lite comment is thus seen in the retort: “You can never ask to be hit” and “there is no excuse of beating a woman”. As noted in the introduction to this Chapter, Gloria has many flaws. In this, she is no different to other people: she is a rounded character. We note, for instance, that she is not averse to devious means to get what she wants (particularly money or luxuries), gossiping to gain favours or for the sake of it, and feeding her appetite for expensive clothes and furniture. She dreams of the “high life”, although she cannot afford it. When she starts dating Obakeng, the usual Gloria who is strong-willed disappears, to be replaced by a timid, weak and voiceless “impostor”.

This impostor is so topical that it dominates a large section of the entire “talk”. Some of the commenters who are critical of the “weak” Gloria stated the following:

1. “Gloria is sending a bad message to women who are being abused”
2. “Gloria is a bad example to women…”

3. “Gloria enjoys being abused, she deserves to be abused, why defend someone abusing you?”
4. “What an example are you setting for your children?”

Audiences want to know what happened to the Gloria they knew, and why she is portrayed as a victim for a protracted length of time before her triumphant ending. Indeed, many confessed that they could not reconcile the two personalities. How could such a strong personality be so weak? Some commenters wished Gloria would be much more decisive. Such readings tend towards a discrepant decoding, where audiences see meanings that are contrary to those encoded by producers of messages. As Mann (2014) observes, new media have become sites of struggle over meaning, representation, and participation. I observed the morphing and merging of the “inside” of the soap opera and the “outside” of the real world when some commenters spoke about their own real-world experiences that were being mirrored by the drama between Gloria and Obakeng.

As noted in Chapter 2, South Africa experiences exceptionally high cases of violence against women (Abrahams et al 2013). Tshepo Mosese, an actor on *Scandal*, stated in 2015 that his favourite storyline of the past decade was the one about Gloria and Obakeng:

> My favourite storyline would have to be of Gloria and Obakeng which tackled gender violence. I felt like it was the most relevant story in terms of what is happening in our society today. There are so many women that are from abusive homes. Those stories need to be told. I think that’s the one story that is really going to hit home given the fact that so many women are going through that type of situation[37]

There is little doubt that the topic resonate widely in South Africa. Reeva Steenkamp, Jayde Panayiotou, Fatima Patel, Anni Dewani, Zanele Khumalo, Dolly Tshabalala were some of the women that made headlines in South Africa between 2014 and 2015, having been killed by their partners. Many commenters on the threads state that they

[37] E-Buzz (2015-01-12). “Tshepo Mosese celebrates 10 years of Scandal!”, http://www.etv.co.za/news/2015/01/12/tshepo-mosese-celebrates-10-years-scandal/ Accessed 26 September 2016.

relate to the topic because they had either experienced domestic violence directly or knew a woman or other women who had suffered it. In some sense, the fictitious became reality as it mirrored the experiences of the Facebook audience. In this other sense, the Facebook platform becomes a space of conversation and dialogue.

In terms of the content of the chat or "talk" itself, the soap opera and the social media platform together became a sort of launch pad for the contestation of traditional and feminist ideas on marriage and relationships, with a focus on the two main characters. As noted, the name of the main female character, Gloria, is mentioned 215 times in the threads while that of her abuser, Obakeng, is mentioned 105 times. The word "women" is however mentioned less than the word "men" as illustrated in Fig 5.18 and 5.19 below.

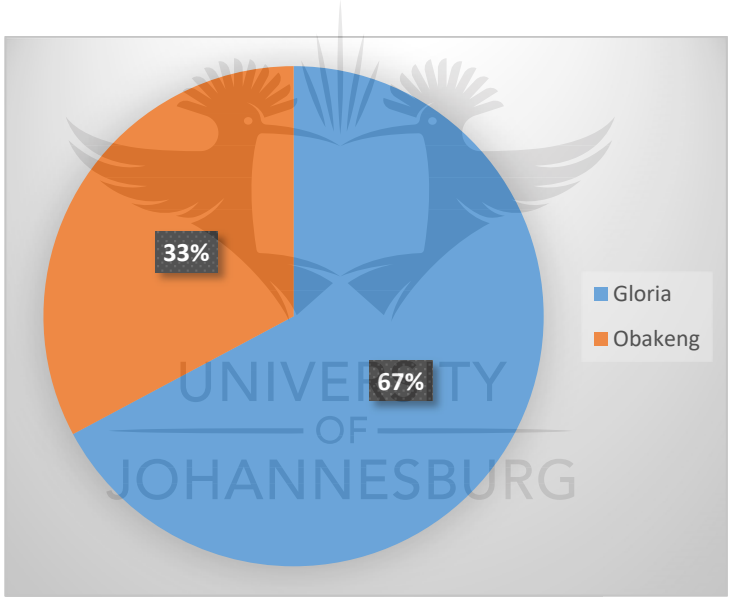


Fig 5.18: Illustration of the frequency mentioning the words "Gloria" and "Obakeng"

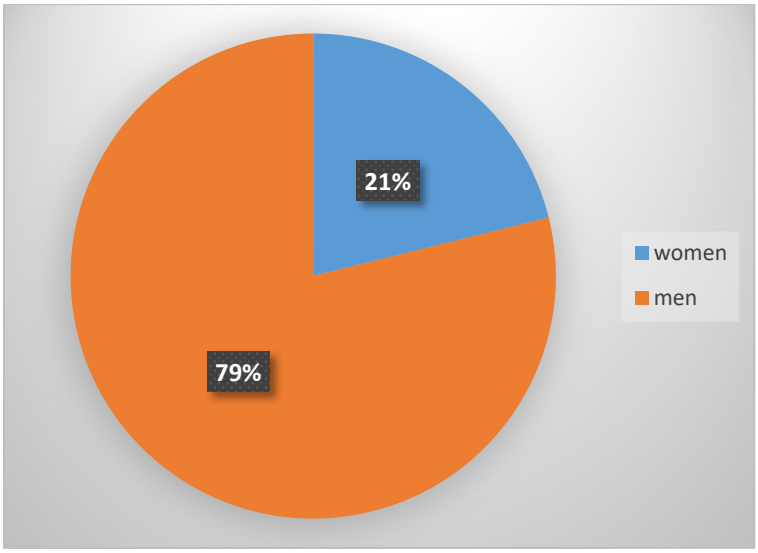


Fig 5.19: Illustration of the frequency mentioning the words "men" and "women".

The *Scandal* fan Facebook page opened itself to "talk" about a topical subject daily affecting many South African women – domestic violence. As we will see, this "talk" is not organic but is influenced by the teasers which the producers posted on the Facebook Fan page. Pages such as "Last Night on *Scandal*", which posted teasers on the previous show, seem to have been expressly placed there to direct the conversations. For instance, *Scandal* would alert fans on the Facebook page that Obakeng will apologise to Gloria as a means to manipulate her to forgive him. The "talk" would be focused on the different aspects the apology, the nature of the apology, the meaning of the apology, its sincerity or lack thereof, and so on. The clearest indication of this direction and flow of talk comes once again from the fact that none of the "talk" referred to domestic violence by women against men. As noted, the *Scandal* episodes in question are intended to present a picture in which men commit violence against women, and not the other way round. At the same time, there is also inevitable fragmentation because some who joined the thread would mention other storylines and characters that have nothing to do with Gloria or Obakeng or gender violence. Interestingly, if one followed the thread long enough, the topic of the apology would be revived in peaks and troughs. The "talk" in question is filtered to some extent through the teaser by the producers but fragmented by the audiences variegated in other characters and storylines. As noted earlier, Gloria and Obakeng are not the main stars of *Scandal*. The fact that a degree of sustained conversation about these relatively minor characters was possible is thus a remarkable testament to the importance of the

topic and the “open” nature of social platforms when it comes to chatting about topical or trending issues.

The way women are framed, positioned and constructed in traditional media has always been problematic due to power relations and the male gaze which inserts women into media as second-class citizens. The situation is even starker for black women. The problem with stereotypes is, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) succinctly points out, “Show a people as one thing over and over again and that is what they become.” Thus representation, in as far as it is regarded as a political issue forms a crucial part of the feminist standpoint. Marshment (1997) posits that without power and agency to define their image and participate in decisions that affect how women are defined, decisions will be left to others to decide (Marshment, in Robinson and Richardson 1997: 125). The way women are perceived is influenced in part by the images that are constructed by media such as television – in this case through the genre of soap opera. Representation is thus a key way in which gendered “reality” is constructed. The grammar we use to talk about women is often a reflection of patriarchy (Ayiera 2010:13). As Dobash and Dobash (1979, 1998) (cited in Gelles 2017: 20) explain, we cannot understand partner abuse within contemporary society unless we “understand and recognize the centuries- old legacy of women as the victims of patriarchal cultures that dominate and control them”.

But, if television representations reinforce dominant ideologies, then feminism not only positions itself as the binary opposite of patriarchy/masculinist worldviews of Obakeng, but chips away at this accumulated power. This political and transformative dimension of feminism may be the reason why, in Adichie’s (2014) words, we must all become feminists. Power relations which subordinate women present themselves differently in different cultures. However, feminism identifies the critique of patriarchy and masculinity as central to any project to defeat gender violence. Many commenters on the thread tended to associate Obakeng’s abuse as a manifestation of patriarchy. This was reflected, for instance, in some of the epithets and name-calling directed at Obakeng, such as calling him a “bull”. The bull is the manifestation of masculinity par excellence. As a symbol, it expresses the display of blind male machismo and masculine virility. Bulls do not only see or care when they hurt females, but justify it as being part of their nature. What else is a bull for if not to dominate “his” wives?

Cavanagh, Dobash and Lewis (2001) found out that men tended to minimise their violent behaviour because of "the advantageous position they hold in the structure of gender relations". Certainly, some traditional hierarchies place men in superior positions in relation to women, and some even treat women as personal possessions. Certainly, Obakeng's attempts to domesticate Gloria by limiting her independence and her ability to raise money through "tripe nights", as well as his discomfort with her position as the owner of a house, suggest that his motivations might be patriarchal. But it is not just patriarchy that we should identify as the focus of critique. As Joachim (2007: 118) contends, gender-based-violence is a "reflection of the broad structures of sexual and economic inequality in society". This is corroborated in a 2017 study, *Violence against women in South Africa: a country in crisis* which shows the systemic nature of gender violence. For instance, the very situation where Obakeng, a senior sales representative selling cleaning products for a big company, is paired with Gloria, a mere cleaner, invokes lopsided power relations.

Whereas soap operas traditionally have been associated with commodity fetishism, consumerism, domesticity and smut – seen in recycled plotlines of extramarital affairs and other issues relating to cheating and deceiving – the episodes examined here focus on a topical issue. There is now a more conscious incorporation of social change issues in soap operas, if only because the genre has an acknowledged potential to shape behavioural change and create awareness (cf. Gerraghty 2001). In *Scandal* the social issue which was in the spotlight was intimate partner violence – a hidden problem because that occurs in the confines of people's homes and other private spaces. The assumed "safe spaces" are, more and more, a "cradle of violence". That *Scandal* sought to reflect this is captured in the nature of social media talk, examples of which we shall consider throughout this section. The mere fact of discussion is a sign of currency and recency. Keeping issues in the spotlight is one step towards resolving them. Indeed, representation is itself a form of intervention. Showing topical issues such as intimate partner violence on television, and sustained interest and discussion on platforms such as Facebook platform, are integral to the long-term goal of tackling such problems by and from the roots.

The social media talk by the Facebook audiences does not show an adequate awareness of the role and place that intimacy plays in such abusive relationships as the one between Gloria and Obakeng. For instance, they do not talk about the fact that the relationship between Gloria and Obakeng is – if it could be called a relationship – a "relationship" among strangers. This lack of intimacy not only complicates their relation to one another but frames how we read the violence that ensues between them. Here are two people who hardly knew each other yet got married and had a wedding. This was, for both of them, a "rebound relationship". A rebound relationship is one in which people enter soon a break-up to seek solace from a companion. A person might be considered to be "on the rebound", says Lamia (2013), "if he or she becomes involved in a relationship that shortly follows the ending of a previous one".[38]

Experts argue that after a break-up such as a divorce, one is in a state of vulnerability so it is recommended that they heal first before they enter into another relationship (Brumbaugh and Fraley, 2014). Lamia (2013) says that:

> The rebound relationship … takes up the space that was left by the previous relationship and provides both stability and distraction from loss rather than a working through. According to this way of thinking, a person should "get over" the loss of a relationship before moving on to the next one, which negates the potential for healing and learning that occurs within the contrast of a new relationship.[39]

Basically, rushing into a new relationship without resolving all the old issues is never a good idea. At least, nobody ought to move on and finds someone new *that quickly*. The longer the waiting, the better. The waiting period gives one time for a self-introspection and to evaluate what went wrong as well as healing.

This is not to say that there are no successful relationships from rebounds (cf. Wolfinger, 2007). Instead, a rebound relationship "may mitigate the hurt, shame, and pain of a break-up" (Lamia 2013). When a person loses a connection, says Lamia (2013), "it is through connecting that recovery takes place." However, the fact that both

[38] Lamia, M.C. (2013). "Rebound relationships", https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/201309/rebound-relationships
[39] Lamia (2013), ibid.

Gloria and Obakeng had *both* just divorced made the situation doubly intricate. Both of them could have been emotionally unprepared to sustain a fulfilling relationship. Could both have been using each other simply as substitutes for love that was lost? If it is the case that Gloria was paralysed by a fear of being without a partner, then perhaps it was this fear, rather than genuine attraction and emotional connection, which could have motivated her to be in the relationship with Obakeng.

Who we are and how we relate to others is partly of identity construction, and social media talk sheds some light on the processes of self-representation and the formation of identities in the online space. The expression of opinions, in this case, was made possible by the soap opera, which gave the fans of the soap a common interest, and by the social media platform which enabled the "talkers" to discourse in a particular way. Spence (2001) argues that soap opera characters cannot be dismissed as merely fictional – they are "true enough to be able to draw moral conclusions, forming opinions, and make comparisons from what they knew from the real world." People's self-reported experiences with domestic violence helped them connect with Gloria and Obakeng's story. This prior experience made it more likely that pieces of the audience's own experience "will infiltrate the screen" (Spence 2001:188).

In as far as soap operas are so compelling to their audiences that they make them believe that they are getting to know about people and life, then Gloria and Obakeng were "real". Ilse van Hemert, the producer of Scandal, even stated to *TVPlus* magazine that she hoped that audiences would be able to separate Peter Moruakgomo from Obakeng. She says, "we discussed that some people may even confuse Obakeng with Peter and attack him personally for what his character is doing to Gloria, especially since Peter is such a convincing actor. So, guys don't slap Peter please!"[40] The use of veiled threats by some in the audiences, such as "I want to meet with (Obakeng) for advice", or to castrate Obakeng and "feed it to the dogs so that he learns to respect women", do indicate that there is some truth to Hemert's concerns about possible danger to Moruakgomo. Such threats also show the thin line between "inside" and "outside", online and offline. One participant even posted a comment suggesting that, if no one was going to do it, they were going to rescue Gloria themselves. Sunden

[40] https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/tv-plus-south-africa/.../284000420541536

(2002) postulates that when people talk about a television programme, they inevitably talk about themselves as well. I observed that seems to be the case in roughly 20 per cent of comments, thus revealing, on the one hand, what I assume were ever-present and ongoing concerns about gender violence in their everyday lives and, on the other hand, a persistent merging of fiction and reality and of "outside" and "inside".

Indeed, some audiences take the "reality show" to extremes as they go as far as giving unsolicited advice, solutions, and reconstructed scenarios to the producers of *Scandal* on how they think Gloria should have handled her situation. For instance, one commenter said: "abusive hypocrites don't change so Gloria don't forgive him", Another also chipped in, saying "why are you defending this dog". As we will see, there is a visceral response from the commenters against intimate partner abuse, expressed in a widespread condemnation of Obakeng in the Facebook comments, which I can characterise as feminist – or at least feminist-lite – in nature. As pointed out in Chapter 3, feminism is a framework placed in the service of social justice. Its core function as an approach is to remind us that we can imagine a world were women are full human beings who are not made in the image of patriarchy.

Indeed, the participants are so proactively "feminist" in their discourse that they use their "advise" to compel the producers of *Scandal* to implement the Facebook audience's frantic suggestions to let Gloria finally "walk away" and file a divorce in order to create a "safe" ending. Obakeng is also ultimately sent to jail as part of such "suggestions". The producers of *Scandal* were also "advised" to find Gloria another man. This kind of audience *participation* introduces a level of participation that would not have been possible before social television. As Pynta et al (2014: 1) point out, the rise of digital technology has seen "a fundamental shift in the way media are consumed". The participation provoked by Obakeng's abuse of Gloria is not just passive consumption of media, but some kind consumption-with-participation. Fragmented consumption and time-shifted viewing has altered the traditional passive role. Interestingly, despite the increased participation there is little evidence that the producers of *Scandal* really listened to audiences and changed their storyline to placate the viewers. Rather, it seems more plausible that the storyline unfolded as intended. Still, the participants were pleased and satisfied that their "advice" had been heeded by the show's producers.

If media consumption is a gendered practice (cf. Ang 1996), then perhaps a question that might need to be addressed is whether or not consumption-with-participation retains some of that gendered-ness. It might be that the fragmentation of social television means a concomitant fragmentation of online gender identities as well. Is gender identity inconsequential online? One participant, who carried a man's name, remarked that she was not a man when one of the commenters responded to her chat by referring to her as a man. It is never clear if she is a man or not, and there is no way of knowing. It seems that, in the "inside" of online spaces, it is possible to slip in and out of identities. At the same time, gender was also progressively revealed in other ways. For instance, one participant "reveals" her gender when she stated in her post that she left the father of her child because he treated her like Obakeng treated Gloria. Therefore, gender is still important at least in as far as it can be held that our understanding of the world is related to our gender social positioning.

The construction of a world in which women such as Gloria triumph over patriarchy is avowedly feminist. Of course, it can be observed that such a construct in which the woman walks away from the violence is complicated and does not always happen like that in reality. In reality, many women do not decisively act on violence against them and stay in abusive relationships. The decision to walk away is not an easy one. As such, the safe ending is more an ideal than reality. Feminism, of course, is unapologetic about creating *utopias* which it hopes can one day become a universal reality for *all* women. On the other hand, comments such as Obakeng is "not man enough" show a complex awareness of gender relations that goes beyond binaries.

We saw in Chapter 2 and 3 that this nuance is contained in the work of Amadiume (1997) and Oyewumi (2005). Amadiume (1997:122) has argued, for instance, that the "matriarchal values and moral system which generated the concepts of love, harmony, peace and cooperation imposed a check on excessive and destructive masculinism". Black feminists such as Hooks (1984) have long warned that an anti-men stance is broadly unproductive. I concur with the view that African feminism is broadly family oriented and whatever solutions that may be sought there cannot be complete without including views of both men and women (cf. Mekgwe 2008: 16). The exclusion of men will only serve to make things worse rather than better. Feminism in its orthodox and

radical strain got to be framed as male-hating instead of just patriarchy-hating. Mekgwe (2008) emphasises that African feminism is not antagonistic to men but, rather, challenges them to be aware of their complicity in women's subjugation so that they can better assist in dismantling gender oppressive structures. A feminism that is anti-men would be rejected as un-Africa by the likes of Amadiume (1997) and Oyewumi (2005).

A black feminist lens is critical if we consider the perspective of those that argue that African identities have been eroded due to the destruction of family institutions through capitalism and colonialism which also rendered women as minors resulting in them becoming invisible. Some also feel that in Africa masculinity is not the biggest threat to women but rather colonialism. Ntuli (2018) argues that we have become obsessed over and fear African masculinities as if this is the root of the problem. In reality, says Ntuli (2018), it is the colonial patriarchal mentality that has reproduced the conservative male gaze across centuries and has stripped African women of their dignity and voice. It is this mentality that positions men like Obakeng as superior to women like Gloria. Unlike the radical feminists, African feminists are comfortable with the idea that men *are part of the solution*. It may be the case that, as Antrobus (2004: 149) suggests, men who are willing to identify publicly with the feminist agenda are few and far between, but ultimately feminism as a political project must be broad-based as opposed to elitist.

The question that thrusts itself to the fore is how much attention abusers such as Obakeng deserve. Should we only listen to the testimony of battered women? Should not Obakeng's reasons, as an abuser, be heard too? I am of the view that abusers merit our attention too. Listening to Obakeng's reasons does not have to be a justification for them. It is just a way of acknowledging that if we are to deal with this scourge, it is important to understand why men batter their intimate partners. Ptacek (1998), for instance, gathered evidence systematically of batterers' perspectives on wife beating. It is also possible that an abuser might be a survivor-turned-perpetrator, a victim-turned-aggressor, and so on, a possibility which requires that we also consider the abuser as a human being. There are always complex reasons why we abuse and are abused (Mills 1998). Furthermore, if we all reflected on the violence in our own lives, the violence we perpetrate on others, and the violence that surrounds us, as well

as all the situations where we have endured intolerable situations or looked the other way, perhaps we may not be so quick to pass judgment on Obakeng. After all, violence and abuse permeate our lives in various forms. Finally, the assumption that permanent and completely victorious escape from abuse is possible may not be wholly correct.

In the debate about whether Obakeng is "man enough", one sees posited the idea that a "real" man does not abuse women. Also manifest in this debate is an interest in not casting an accusative blanket on *all* men. That is, there is some nuance to be detected, where not *all* men are abusers and where being a man does not equal abuser. Rather, some men can be feminist. Again, this echoes Adichie's (2014) vision that we should all be feminists. The "family oriented" grounding of African feminism was further observed in the fact that some participants still attached a lot of respect to institution of marriage. Hence posts sought to proffer solutions and advice, in the revered tradition of great aunts. This "great aunt" advice was offered to both Gloria and Obakeng. This signals that some commenters realised that the two were in it together. That is, despite Obakeng being unanimously identified as the villain, some fans still harboured hope that Gloria and Obakeng's marriage could be salvaged. We thus see participants defining their own fears, drawing their own boundaries and suggesting their own models of justice, making this study part of indigenous knowledge-making reflective of the participants' grounded experiences, local sense making.

Men and women are, for better or worse, always in this together because, if we follow closely Amadiume's contestation, culturally, gender roles are nebulous. In the African cosmology, gender roles are reversed and reversible. As Ang (1996: 470) notes, gender identity is both "multiple and partial, ambiguous and incoherent permanently in process of being articulated, disarticulated and rearticulated". For instance, a male relative from one's maternal side can assume the roles of a woman. In that role they can speak as a woman. A man can be an aunt, and a woman can be an uncle. In the Ndebele language, an uncle is known as *babakazi*, which translates to "female father". In the Shona tradition, a *sekuru* (uncle – your mother's brother) is recognised as a "mother", while a *tete* (aunt – your father's sister) is recognised as a "father". This means that a *sekuru* can function in a female role, and a *tete* in a male role. There is no contradiction in this whatsoever. The effort, or at least desire, to *include men* for a

solution to Africa's considerable gender violence problems is one that is constructive and worthy of building upon.

There is a general awareness, in the forums, of the *psychological* behaviour of men who abuse women. There is a clear awareness of Obakeng as an abuser. For example, it is clear in the comments that there is consciousness that "abusive men shift blame and don't realise they have a problem". As some of the participants in the social media talk put it, "they make you feel guilty", they "hit you again and again", and they "hit you then apologise". The awareness of Obakeng as an abuser is reflected in the angry epithets and extensive name-calling directed at him. Obakeng, for instance, is called a "bastard", "dog", "controller", "not man enough", "pig", "experienced abuser who gets away with it", "bull", "woman beater", "pervert", "monster", "coward", "ugly", "insecure", "stupid", "rat", "shameless", "jealous mamma's boy", "good for nothing", "fool", and "pervert". This included the violent calls to "meet him for advice" and to castrate him and feed his private parts to dogs. It must be noted that name-calling and trolling is a practice amplified on social media. It is well-nigh impossible to find social media threads where there is no trolling and name-calling. Research has shown that this is partly facilitated by online anonymity (cf. Kozinets 2015). Other participants expressed anger by stating that Obakeng annoyed and disgusted them, that he "sucks" and so on. Phrases such as "I don't like him", "I will kill him", and "he must burn in hell" are frequently used. There are even veiled threats such as "I want to meet with him for advice".

The use of the expression *nxa* is particularly illustrative. This expression, used to express deep disgust, is used by many Africans in sub-Saharan Africa. Verbally, it is made by sucking in air through the lips and clicking the tongue to produce a "nxa" sound. The term *nxa* itself does not exist formally in the lexicon but is a social media invention of onomatopoeia. I observed that *nxa* is used several times to show disgust, often directed at Obakeng, but sometimes at Gloria herself. Another social media neologism used extensively is "kkkk", to indicate humour. Hence both Obakeng and Gloria were laughed at. The audience, for instance, mocked and ridiculed Obakeng's behaviour – for instance, when he would call Gloria "Sunflower" despite abusing her – using this "word". The use of *nxa* and *kkkk* suggest an attempt to capture real world

verbal forms in chat form, just like emojis and emoticons try to capture emotion via words typed on a keypad.

Gloria is not spared from the angry comments and name-calling. As observed earlier, some of the audiences tend to blame the victim. For others, it seems to be a case of frustration with the dithering and paralysis of the character. Gloria is thus labelled a "fool", "dumb", "stupid", "desperate", "weak", "blind", "a bad example to women", "loser", "boring". Some are angry with her because they feel that she enjoys the abuse. She is accused of being blind to her situation. Much unsolicited "advice" is offered to her. For instance, some suggest solutions that are problematic, such as wishing Gloria could go back to her first husband. Abel, as we noted, had cheated on her and had already married another woman. As noted, this "participation" constitutes part of the tapestry of social television that has now been made possible by social media. As reality shows such as *Idol*, the *Voice* and *Big Brother* have shown, audience participation is possible through comments and voting. The traditional idea of television as just a one-way flow is no longer tenable.

The diversity of comments exemplifies this two-way interaction, as shown by the fact that, while there was a general feeling of anger and disgust towards Obakeng for being a serial abuser and seemingly getting away with it, there is also negativity towards Gloria for allowing the abuse to happen for too long before realising her predicament. Exasperated posts express the view that it is "typical of women" to not quickly move out and away from an abuser. Indeed, some commenters felt like "clapping" Gloria, just to help her to "wake up" to the reality that being beaten does not constitute love. As such, the threats of violence are not targeted only at Obakeng but also at the victim. As noted, such threats also show the thin line between "inside" and "outside", online and offline. Still others counselled that until one is in Gloria's shoes, one can never know how it feels to be in such a situation in real life.

The anonymity of online spaces, coupled with the convergence of "inside' and "outside", provide a space where there is willingness to talk, share, express opinions, vent feelings, disagree and troll about gender-based violence. There is, for instance, intermittent discussion of the meaning of women's emancipation, and whether freedom and equality is possible in all spaces, such as private, public, home and work.

Equality is defined as sameness in terms of social status or legal and or political rights although there is a whole debate globally on what the term equality means (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004:37). Some participants did not believe that independence, freedom and equality for women could be enjoyed equally in all spaces. Rather, there are times when it applied only at work and not at home, or in public and not in private, and so on. That is, women's independence and equality is an ongoing negotiation. Context, for some, mattered more in the negotiation. The idea that, customarily, in African homes, the man is the presumed head of the house, still obtains in various, diffracted forms. This was so even in cases where his capability to provide for his family was impaired or where, like Obakeng, he did not even own the house he claimed to be head of.

Even more interestingly, the family or home is considered by some commenters to be a private space which is closed to interference by outsiders and strangers. Of course, this privacy and "domesticity" is also why domestic violence is by and large hard to detect. Also, this non-interference in the "privacy" of the home can lead to a legitimation of male power in cases such as domestic violence. It appears from the comments, that how some women in African contexts react in the family has a lot to do with their own *socialisation* and how they were brought up. Socialisation, in as far as it is a process of acquiring what one knows, informs one's cultural standpoint, knowledge and belief systems, acquired through the society one lives in, the language, formal or informal rules of behaviour and sets of knowledge.

It is clear that the participants in the discussion are not homogenous. For instance, some commenters believe that the emancipation of women has (and needs) limits, while others regard it as an appropriate ideal that, one day, can be reached. The participant who uses a masculine name in her chats describes herself as a married woman from the "old school", who regards the man as the uncontested head of the house. She blames "so-called equality" for destroying the "fabric" of marriage. In her view, women nowadays lack toughness, divorce easily, and allege abuse unnecessarily. This commenter thinks Gloria is impolite and not exemplary enough for her children. For instance, she accuses Gloria of lying and doing as she pleases, without consulting her husband as she should have done, and of being excessively

materialistic. Of course, she puts out the disclaimer that her views should not be taken to mean that she supports abuse.

It is instructive that this “old school” participant’s views on marriage are not shared by most participants. The other participants, while agreeing that Gloria may be imperfect, argue that the issue of violence must be viewed and treated separately and must *never* be condoned. There is, thus, active disagreement and lack of consensus on the central issues. One commenter asked, incredulously, “How could one condone abuse?” and “Would you want that for your kid?” I do not regard these disagreements as a bad thing. Rather, social media talk is predicated on what Bailey (2005: 70) calls “drawing different types of knowledge”. The “talk” necessarily brought about varied and differentiated views. This could be put down, among other things, to differences in the participants’ experiences, and their worldviews and ways of making meaning. As noted, the commenter who appears to justify Obakeng’s actions clearly states that they are not condoning women abuse, although she is still labelled as doing so.

There are a few others, as well, who condone Gloria’s beating, and would suggest solutions which are themselves also problematic. For instance, one suggested that instead of beating a wife, a husband could refuse to eat her food “to teach her a lesson”. Another commenter is all for revenge, stating that if Obakeng was her husband and he hit her “he better not eat my food”, because she would poison him. Others counsell that two wrongs do not make a right. The debate, at turns, would turn personal as some participants reprimand and accuse each other of being abusers and encouraging the likes of Obakeng to oppress women, or of being soft cry-babies and snowflakes who cannot handle the rigours of marriage. Vitriolic attacks took the direction of, “how can you, as a woman” say that? Others stated “this, coming from you a woman, is sickening”, “sad to read a comment like yours, especially coming from a woman”, “stupid comment from a female”, “I didn’t realise that you are a woman, it makes it worse,” “what kind of an animal are you, you are not human” and “you are mad, if it was your mother how would you feel?”

There is also consensus, such as the fact that women in general must be more empowered to deal with violence and abuse, although there is no agreement as to how this could be done, or how much intervention was enough. There is general

awareness that women undergoing abuse need to be physically taken out of dangerous situations. The *Scandal* Facebook page thus functions as a digital "public sphere" for personal, gendered and feminist-lite ideas and opinions about intimate partner violence, as well as sharp disagreement and polarisation. If, as Foucault (1979: 101) suggests, discourse is power, then the social media space provides for the collective articulation of opinions that could not have been shared in the same way before the age of social television.

One commenter only stated that she was a woman after she received what appeared like a compliment which said, "You are the man...you make a lot of sense". She had indicated that women were making divorce so cheap by wanting to run away from their marriages the moment they are beaten or running to the police "when husbands do silly mistakes or beat you". Although pointing out it was wrong for men to beat their wives, she further argued that there are no equal rights in the marriage. As controversial as the two "women's" views are, they have every right to voice their opinions as much as those with opposing views. The bodiless space that technologies provide shield the women who would not otherwise speak their minds in public. It also makes it possible for women to disguise themselves while putting their views across as best they could. Finally, it is an indication that women are not one homogenous group. No singular feminist framework can suffice to describe all women everywhere. In a sense, this is a justification of the blended theoretical framework which was used in this study.

The contestations, as far as I could tell, broadly settled into two groups. Some posts frame Gloria as a properly defiant, non-conformist person and an assertive independent woman who can *never* quite settle down in any marriage. This view about Gloria tend to be found in the posts of those commenters who are disappointed that "the Gloria they knew" would not have stood for Obakeng's nonsense. This group tend to blame the producers of *Scandal* for watering down Gloria's character in order to score educational points about gender violence. The other grouping includes posts that, without condoning his behaviour, sympathise with Obakeng and criticise Gloria for her real or perceived flaws. The first group seems to accord roughly with the "new school" (perhaps millennials, also known as Generation Y or the Net Generation),

which I suspect would have little time for conservative notions about the real or perceived role of women.

The second group appears to consist of participants holding conservative views, the so-called “old school”. The first group sees no problem, for instance, with Gloria making some money from the “tripe nights” and see no reason why she should consult Obakeng about her every move. The second group judges her harshly for acting without her husband’s consent. Gloria seems to have good intentions for her actions although she is not aware that she is offending her husband. The first group thus sympathises with the idea of financial independence, and the fact that a woman is autonomous from her husband. The second group blames the “new ideas” about equality for causing strife in marriages. For this group, women must submit to their husbands. When women submit, there will be peace in the home. Suffice to say that such a debate can only end when the two sides agree to disagree.

The element of a generational clash (of ideas) persists in many of the exchanges concerning the place of women in society, and on the question of the public/private dichotomy. A few commenters, particularly those who tend to favour limits to gender equality, admitt to being “old school”. *Scandal*, as we noted in Chapter 1 and 4, is watched by the 15-30-year-old age group. When one considers that social media is a very young medium, both in terms of its age and the age of most of its users, then it is plausible that social media talk mostly carries the views of millennials, or at least a generational clash of views. Millennials, born after the 1990s, are however powerfully impacted by popular culture such as music, film, and television – particularly if they are based in urban areas where the digital divided has more or less closed in the last decade. Their world is fast-paced, individualistic, trendy, and more postmodern than modern. It would follow that millennials may prefer feminism in a post-modern key, since it allows for the opening up of a new set of possibilities for the representation of women, work and family, in public and in private, in “real life” and on television. It creates space for new and cross-pollinated narratives to sprout and offers creative possibilities for women. The caveat for this study is that there was no way to tell the ages of the participants in the threads.

The public/private dichotomy which sees women confined to the home, where they are seen but not heard, and where, when it concerns their bodies, they are confined to domestic spaces, has been identified by some feminists as lying at the root of patriarchal insubordination of women (cf. Das Gupta 2007; Lazar 2008; Alcoff 2005). We see Gloria facing pretty much the same predicament. Obakeng shames her, for instance, for not conducting household chores and doing her "wifely duties" such as cooking for him. This is not only a form of stereotyping of woman as a housewife. It is also an attempt to inscribe her body as good only for domestication and for gratification of male needs. Gloria, however, has desires that exceed the space of the kitchen. This leads to conflict between husband and wife. Meanwhile, Obakeng does not see any contradiction in him travelling on work assignments and enjoying the freedom that comes with such travel. It is as if men are naturally made for public spaces and the broader public realm.

The public realm is characterised by activities such as paid work and travel. In a broader framework, it includes enjoying rights of full citizenship and exercising political and democratic rights. The private space to which Gloria is being relegated, on the other hand, consists of anything that the man demarcates as the woman's natural space. This includes child-bearing, satisfying male conjugal needs, motherhood, and domestic labour. Here the feminine is perceived as private and removed from politics (cf. Pateman 1989: 3). This dichotomy has been met by the storm of feminist politics and activism. Of course, there are many surface changes to the traditional public/private dichotomy. For instance, many women like Gloria also engage in paid work. The dichotomy no longer strictly confines women to the home or in the kitchen. Still, as Walby (1990: 201) observes, exploitation of women in both the public and private arenas persists. Even where women engage in paid work, they still face segregation through pay structures that favour men. Sexual harassment is also rife, even where it is not seen, as exemplified by the recent #MeToo movement. That is, ironically, although, women "are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth", they now "have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited."

During apartheid, in South Africa, women did not exist legally as full citizens, but only as minors tied to their husbands. In this context, a further example of a "whole society in which to roam and be exploited" would be a marriage contract where, although

women are now subject to laws that give them definitive legal existence, independent of their husbands, the wedding custom of the bride being “given away” by their father to her husband may be interpreted by men like Obakeng as justifying the subordinating of women. As Pateman (1989) reminds us, although the marriage contract appears as if it is an agreement between two consenting parties of equal standing, in reality it is still predicated on a power relation of domination and subordination. Moreover, the marriage contract can be construed as giving Obakeng rights of access to Gloria’s body and labour as a housewife. We see Gloria attempting to negotiate these constraints in various ways. She owns a house, and, by holding “tripe nights”, she raises additional income. She also employs a helper to assist with her household chores. In this way Gloria refuses to subsist as a strictly duty-bound wife. It is, of course, this very attempt to be nominally emancipated that creates problems between her and Obakeng. Interestingly, commenters speculated that, had it been Obakeng in charge of the tripe nights, instead of Gloria, they may not have been viewed as a problem but, rather, a credible business venture.

A further example of how the oppression of women metamorphoses and moves with the times pertains to the marriage contract and property rights. The relationship of gender-based violence and property rights for women stirred a hornet’s nest of debate. Why did property keep coming in between men and women in cases where women like Gloria owned property and men like Obakeng did not? What is the status of Gloria’s property which she owned before meeting Obakeng? If a woman is entitled to her husband’s property on divorce or death of the husband, should Obakeng not also be entitled to Gloria’s property upon their divorce? Since the two are husband and wife, should they not be in community of property? Why does she insist that the house is hers and hers alone? Had the poles been reversed, would it have been justified for Obakeng to claim that the house was his and his alone? Is Obakeng within his legal rights in the belief that he could have the property sold? Although it is wrong that, when Gloria refuses to cede her rights, he beats her, is it wrong for him to claim the house as his? What does marriage mean in relation to property?

As Head (2017) asserts, prioritising violence against women – even to the point of seeing it as important as, for instance, getting the economy back on track – is what can radically change the situation on the ground in South Africa. The question that

divides opinion, however, is still about how *exactly* to go about it in a way that is broad-based and efficacious. The success, as well as the limits, of a campaign such as #MeToo Campaign is particularly instructive in this regard for three reasons. Firstly, it draws attention to the fact that, although laws and policies enacted in the mainstream public and political realm theoretically have a sharp bearing on what happens in the private sphere, action does not march in step with legislation or formal recognition and pronouncements. The United Nations Decade for women, between the 1980's and 1990's, has come and gone. In the 1990's SADC made violence against women into regional priority. However, there is still a huge gap when it comes to how abuse is revealed and exposed. Courts of law are useless if one does not bring the case to the magistrate or judge. This is where social media comes in.

#MeToo is a signal case as it was driven purely by social media talk. The movement has shown that social media talk can be an effective tool both for sharing personal narratives and for advocacy in tackling persistent, hidden problems women face. Previously hidden cases of sexual harassment have come to the fore, and women are using social media to refuse to be shut out as before. And, in the same way that #MeToo foregrounded sexual harassment, with victims pointing out how the campaign made them realise how many times they had been sexually harassed throughout their lives, without noticing it, the discussion about Gloria and Obakeng on the *Scandal* Facebook page becomes a mirror to those facing the same abuse or those who do not realise that certain taken-for-granted norms and relations in their lives are abusive. It is perhaps no surprise that Gloria's perceived "blindness" and passivity in the face of abuse, in particular, attracts the most attention. The *Scandal* episodes, and talk about them on social media, thus serves as consciousness-raising awareness.

If, as Hooks (1990) would say, there is a tendency, to forget, ignore and dismiss the existence of black women, social media talk brings back some of that awareness. Instead of merely complaining and staying angry and disappointed at the lack of stories about black women, black women should start telling these stories and talking about these issues. The findings in this study suggest that social media is one way of telling these stories and talking about critical issues. Such social media talk will need, of course, to be more grounded in the African worldview, instead of interpreting local realities in borrowed lenses. An important example of repurposed social media talk is

#BlackTwitter. #BlackTwitter is not just social media, but is a cultural identity built around Twitter users who focus intensely on issues of interest to the black community. As with Black Twitter, there was no homogeneity in the ideas expressed by the participants on the *Scandal* Facebook page. The "talk", as it meandered, provides a dynamic opportunity for sharing narratives, points of view, and experiences as a community brought together by participants' love for a local soap opera. As Oyewumi (2005) has argued, there is a crucial need to incorporate African idioms and experiences from our social world, into how we deal with gender issues. These help to make sense of our own world, in a grounded way, on our own terms.

Finally, as some commenters tend to point out, despite a general consensus about how abhorrent violence against women and children is, the ever-present reality *on the ground* is that these things keep happening. Statistics show little or no reduction in the incidence and prevalence of violence. STATSSA's *Victims of Crime Survey 2016/17* shows that 68 percent of South African men (nearly 10 million men) do not think women deserve the same constitutional rights as men. Other surveys show nearly 8 percent (12 men out of a 100) of men think it is acceptable to hit a female partner during an argument. Hence, as much as the awareness on violence against women seems to be prevalent, at least in the social media chat under review, there are still the 12 Obakengs out of 100 South African men, who will beat up women during an argument.

The very encouraging and enlightened comments on domestic violence on the *Scandal* Fan Facebook page provoke the obvious question: if people are so "woke" and enlightened about domestic violence, why then is South Africa still in the persistent grip of alarming statistics? Should we conclude that audiences do not actually exist in the real world? Are audiences just paying a lip service to domestic violence? Could this disjunction be why some analysts define audience as "fiction" because they sometimes do not match what they say or what they say has little relation to the real world? The question of "inside" and "outside", raised in the Chapter 3 and 4, looms large. It is still a monumental question that is hard to settle. These other questions raised here provoke many other questions in turn. Could it be that the importance attached to the role of platforms such as Facebook is exaggerated? Who is really accessing these platforms? Who is talking on them and why? Do these viewer chats

amount to anything? Do they amount to anything when one in three women is killed every day in South Africa?

What are we missing? Bingwa (2018), commenting after a South African woman, Nompumelelo Mthembu, was doused with petrol, had a tyre placed around her neck, and then set light by her estranged father of her three children, asks why it is that when women are killed by their husbands it is not “breaking news”. He asks: “Is the law listening? Is the legal system? The courts, government, parliament? Are we?” Perhaps we need to pause and engage in a deeper conversation and reflection about the quality and direction of the conversation on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram. The impressive conclusions about social media talk stand in stark contrast to the realities on the ground.

How useful and relevant are Facebook’s algorithms to Africa and its persistent socio-economic problems? Are algorithms even as objective as we are told they are? What if the algorithms are wrong? Mathisen (2017) notes that algorithms contain values and ideologies and are as good as the people who created them. For instance, they are capable of “replicating and exacerbating existing biases and discrimination” (Mathisen 2017). Some are turning to algorithms because of their ability to deal with sheer volumes and complexes of data in ways humans cannot. To make determinations based on algorithms may exacerbate our problems if algorithms are encoded with gender and racial biases. There is also fear that there is not much understanding how Zuckerberg’s and Google’s algorithms, for instance, are managed, by whom, and for what purpose. There is much mystery about the real aims of the big corporations. What do Google and Facebook really want? Should we be trusting them with the future of communication? Do I feel this social media talk can lead to action? Can it be the basis of prevention and intervention? Can it influence systemic changes?

A provisional answer I could give to many of these searching questions is located at the heart of social media talk *itself*: a clear deficiency in the comment threads is the absence of an awareness of systemic and root causes of domestic violence. The discussion lacks any explanatory power that would contextualise gender violence in South Africa in the broad sweep of history and political economy. As such, there is little or no attempt to talk about how to deal with the broad structures of sexual and

economic oppression in contemporary South African society. The solutions offered are all at an interpersonal level, in the typical “aunty” and “uncle” way of advising young couples. The limitation of this kind of intervention is that it only reads and sees the problem as a question of personal limitation and individual failing in the characters of Obakeng and Gloria. Once one talks to the couple in the manner of a psychologist or a motivational coach, and pinpoint their individual failings, we would be on the way to recovery and resolution. We see the psychological approach at its best when participants define their own fears, draw their own boundaries and suggest their own models of justice.

But this psychological approach misses the point. Obakeng is not just a cruel male (cf. Sakarombe 2018), and Gloria is not merely a disobedient wife. The problems between them are part of a broader societal problem affecting the whole of South African society. This means that the problem is systemic and is located in the broader patterns of South African social, cultural, political, and economic experience, realities and histories. Wright (2011: 5) has observed, for instance, that social disorganisation theory can be used to show how structural characteristics of neighbourhoods, “such as severe economic disadvantage” and “neighborhood concentrated disadvantage and resource deprivation” can cause systemic patterns of intimate partner violence. Higher levels of IPV have been found in areas that are characterised by disadvantage and resource deprivation. Research grounded in social disorganisation theory assessing neighbourhood effects on IPV has found that concentrated poverty, disadvantage, and the percent of female headed households with children are associated with higher levels of IPV (Wright 2011: 6). Solving the psychological problems of one couple such as Obakeng and Gloria will not help much because the problem affects millions. Rather, the intervention must seek to transform the “structures of life” of South Africans, so that domestic violence ceases to be systemic but becomes an isolated problem for individuals. Only then can incidence and prevalence fall. Piecemeal, pyschologistic and mentalist approaches are bound to fail.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study investigated how social media audiences talk, comment about and discuss specific social issues, in this case, gender violence using a feministic lens. The study argued that discussion threads on social media constitute a specific mode of "talk" different to all other forms of "talk" that we had been used to pre-social media. As illustration of how "social media talk" happens and the various complex forms it takes, the study draws on specific forms of Facebook "talk" by audiences of e-tv's Soap Opera, *Scandal,* for a variety of reasons. Audience interaction on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has given rise to a phenomenon that has been called "social television" which is also a central focus of this study. It is interested in what sort of meanings are generated on social media. The study is chapterised in a way that allows for a comprehensive treatment of the key questions.

This includes exploring literature on all the key concepts of the study namely "talk", gender-based violence, soap opera, audience and Facebook and how they interlink. The "talk" was provoked by etv's soap opera Scandal's episodes on gender-based violence aired in 2014 to mark the16 Days of Activism observed globally from November 25 to December 10 of each year as part of the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Fans of the soapie flighted on Prime Time Monday to Friday and Saturdays took to social media to comment on the episodes focusing on a character Gloria being abused by her second husband Obakeng. The literature review reveals how these key concepts intertwine, enabling the "talk" to take place.

Television watching is no longer an isolated activity due to smart phones, tablets and computers which allows people to share their experience in real time via social media and in the case of this study, via Facebook. Soap operas are indeed a vital vehicle used to change social behaviour to tackle difficult and controversial topics such as gender-based-violence. Audiences in this space are invisible yet real as evidenced

from real life experiences shared on the platform. Facebook is where most people "congregate" with at least 16 million South Africans using it every month.

The study employed a multi-theoretical feminist framework that encompasses representation, online identity and a blend of postmodern feminism, cyber feminism and black feminism to best capture as much of female experience as possible. This is because there is no one single truth about women and one feminist theory can never be adequate as women are not one homogeneous group but are divided along racial lines, class, sexual orientation and inter-generational lines among others. Having a multiple and fragmented identities is viewed as liberating. Feminism as a political ideology is never the same for every woman. It is situational, contextual, cultural and has racial and class connotations. How women are represented becomes central. Although gender-based-violence is a global menace, it does not mean the same to every woman. Some may attach it to patriarchy and masculinity but others see it as structural or as a private affair. While it is not an easily talked about subject generally, social media is making it possible for people who would not otherwise have space to voice their opinions about gender-based-violence to share their views without necessarily revealing who they really are. Even when cyber violence is a reality, social media is unstoppable and unavoidable because it is the in-thing. It is giving people new identities as it is a new tool which keeps on evolving. As people comment, new identities are formed, and feminist identities are just as crucial because women are the most affected by gender-based violence. Both Black feminism and post-modern feminism are finding new identities online with more women keen to see real life examples from their own whom they identify with. They want to share their stories and produce homegrown solutions to their problems. There is no one-size fit all as black women seek their own voice and negotiate their own rights without being prescribed to.

The study employed netnography as research methodology, where I was both a participant and observer "wearing" a feminist lens. It is pertinent to note here that it is not the method that makes this a feminist inquiry but the research questions. One of the distinct characteristics of pure netnography is that all data must be obtained online simply because online research needs to be tested by the most appropriate research methodologies that best answer the research question/s. This allowed me to immerse

and dig deeper for a more nuanced understanding of the “talk” in question. It enabled me to answer the how, what and why of my study in a broader way and to articulate my methodological thinking. The concepts of “outside” and “inside” enabled me to examine the ontology of Facebook where the “talk” takes place. I was able to examine questions such as what is meant by friend on Facebook and to closely examine what type of place Facebook is. I discovered that Facebook communities construct their forms of talk. The invisible is made visible and the private becomes public.

Contexts of intimacy between the central characters under focus in the topic of gender-based-violence which drove the “talk” in question was highlighted. Was it love or was it a question of two divorcees trying to fill the void left by their partners? I describe the episodes under scrutiny in this study to provide context before the analysis of the findings. There is a general awareness of GBV’s complex nature such as its causes, solutions and cycle of violence. The *Scandal* teasers set the tone of the "talk" generally although there are multiple conversations happening at the same time. There is widespread condemnation of GBV although there are those who believe violence against Gloria by Obakeng is justified. Both Gloria and Obakeng are criticised- Gloria for putting up with violence and Obakeng for physically and psychologically abusing Gloria. At the same time the audience want the couple's troubled marriage to work out. It is a truly educational and public sphere where various ideas are proffered and where offline real-life experiences are shared. It is a meeting point of the online and offline, suggesting that *Scandal* is a mirror of reality. It appears that there is a convergence of cultural ideas around marriage and GBV. It is an indigenous knowledge production platform where people are at home using indigenous languages. The pattern of conversation is not the usual turn-take we know but is a multiple form of conversations which in the normal sense would be chaotic. The platform poses a syntactic challenge as commenters use abbreviated words, which if one is not familiar, can lose the essence of what is being talked about.

6.2 Recommendations for future studies

This study has shown that social media is a source of not just big data, but rich, socially relevant data. Big data is a buzz word these days so researching on how this data produced by social media “talk” can be a source for solutions to social challenges like gender-based violence will help us understand how we can move beyond the “talk” to

change. For example, the use of artificial intelligence to map and create indigenous feminist knowledge solutions and smart solutions to some of the social challenges faced by women. Analysing vast amounts of data helps us understand and make predictions about ourselves. It is conceivably crucial therefore that future studies should lean towards the progression from web 2.0 which was about this study to web 3.0 which is about web intelligence.

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